

**The Departmental System
and
Confederate Strategy in the West**

by

Ryan Peter Toews

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

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RYAN PETER TOEWS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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ABSTRACT

The system of geographically defined military departments set the parameters for both the planning and the implementation of Confederate strategy during the American Civil War. This thesis shows how specific changes in the departmental organization interacted with the changes in Southern strategy in the West.

First, the growth of the departmental system is chronologically outlined and discussed in terms of the various factors which influenced its development. Second, the problems in the evolving departmental structure are examined; these primarily were rooted in the inherent tensions between regionally based departments and the need for greater unity of command. Within this context, Jefferson Davis is evaluated in his role as Commander-in-Chief of the Confederate army. Finally the departmental system is considered regarding its contribution towards the final Confederate defeat in the West.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes to examine the development of the departmental system of military administration in the western Confederate States of America during the course of the Civil War. Whatever may have been the strategies implemented by the South in its struggle for secession, it can be argued that it was the departmental system through which these plans were or were not carried out. An evaluation of this system must be made to be able to understand the context of the Southern war effort. The departmental system in the West provides the focus for this assessment.¹ It was here that the Rebels suffered their worst defeats and the departmental system was put to its most severe test.

In 1861 the years of sectional antagonism between the North and the South came to a head with the creation of a separate Southern state. With the outbreak of war in April of this year, the newly formed Confederate States of America was faced with what would be its paramount problem

¹The West of the Civil War period was the region between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. The region on the far side of the Mississippi, which we today would call the West, was known as the Trans-Mississippi.

throughout its brief four years of existence, namely to maintain an effective military strategy for survival.

The answer to this problem appeared to be simple on the surface. The South did not seek to acquire control over new territories, nor did it need to win the war by conquest of the North. It only asked to be left alone and be allowed to pursue its own independent role as a separate nation-state. Towards this goal, all that was thought to be required was to impress upon the Northern government and people the futility of a forced reunion. Indeed, in the days before the outbreak of actual fighting many secessionists believed that there would be no war at all. The North was considered to have no desire to undertake the expenditure of the blood and gold necessary to bring the South back into the Union. After the beginning of the conflict the war was predicted to be of short duration. Once the South's determination to defend their home was realized by the North, the war would be won. Even when the realization that the war would be drawn out and the North indeed was prepared to engage in a long expensive struggle the basic underlying strategy of the Confederates did not change. The strategy adopted by the Rebels was defensive in orientation; Confederate armies would wait for Union forces to come to them and

then seek to concentrate and turn back the attackers.²

This strategy, termed the offensive-defensive, sought to bring about a battle of annihilation that would destroy the enemy army. The leading military theoretician of the period, Baron Henri de Jomini, emphasized that such a battle of annihilation was an ideal that strategic planners should strive towards. He cited Napoleon as the leading practitioner of such a strategy, the Napoleonic victories of Austerlitz and Marengo being two good examples of such an engagement. Jomini, however, also allowed that such a Napoleonic battle might not always be possible. Therefore, he also advocated a second, albeit less desirable, form of strategy, that of a war of exhaustion. By this he meant a war that sought to destroy the enemy's ability to wage war by the occupation of territory, thus depriving an opposing army of its means of existence.³ Although the degree to which Jomini was actually read by Civil War leaders is a matter of some contention, he nevertheless provides an excellent model

²Frank E. Vandiver, Rebel Brass: The Confederate Command System (Baton Rouge, 1956), pp. 16-17; Frank E. Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Strategy", Bernard Mayo (ed.), The American Tragedy: The Civil War in Retrospect (Hampton-Sydney, Va., 1959), pp. 20-21.

³Archer Jones, "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, A Reinterpretation", Military Affairs, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (1970), pp. 127-128; Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, How the North Won, A Military History of the Civil War (Urbana, Ill., 1983), pp. 21-24.

for understanding the strategic thinking of the period.⁴ By effecting a dispersal of military strength the strategy of exhaustion by the North could be prevented as all territory vital to the Confederate war effort would be defended. Should the opportunity for a battle of annihilation arise the concentration of various armies could serve to provide the necessary troops to decisively strike down an invading Northern army.

This system of counteroffensives against Union invasionary moves could not, of course, exist in a vacuum. A method of exercising control over the various defensive forces, and the ability to use these forces to implement a specific strategic policy, was established from the start. Throughout 1861, as the war slowly grew in magnitude, the entire South was gradually divided up into various military departments. These departments were to be the

⁴For a series of views on the importance of Jomini in Civil War strategy see David Donald, Lincoln Reconsidered (New York, 1956), pp. 82-102; Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Strategy", pp. 19-32; T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership North and South", David Donald (ed.), Why the North Won the Civil War (Baton Rouge, 1960), pp. 23-47; Jones, "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War: A Reinterpretation", pp. 127-131; Thomas L. Connelly and Archer Jones, The Politics of Command: Factions and Ideas in Confederate Strategy (Baton Rouge, 1973), pp. 3-30; Joseph L. Harsh, "Battlesword and Rapier: Clausewitz, Jomini and the American Civil War", Military Affairs, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4 (1974), pp. 133-138; Grady McWhiney, "Jefferson Davis and the Art of War", Civil War History, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (1975), pp. 101-112. For a historiographical outline of the above see T. Harry Williams, "The Return of Jomini--Some Thoughts on Recent Civil War Writing", Military Affairs, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4 (1975), pp. 204-206.

structural framework through which strategic designs would be carried out.⁵

Each departmental command covered a specific geographical area and was charged with the defense of this same area. Hopefully, each department would also be able to supply the troops within its jurisdiction with the sustenance necessary for their survival. To this end the department need not always be confined to an exact war zone, it could also include a large logistical hinterland. Within each department the departmental commander was to husband his troops to exploit any local opportunities for a counteroffensive. A departmental commander, in the view of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, would be able to act as he saw fit within his own department; he was to have autonomy within his jurisdiction. The departmental commander was also the final authority on any potential reinforcement of a neighbouring department or in any co-operative effort with the same.⁶

Co-ordination between departments, as opposed to co-operation, fell under the jurisdiction of the government in Richmond. This included President Davis, his various Secretaries of War and the War Department. As President, Davis was also the Commander-in-Chief of the Confederate army. Because of his refusal to appoint a General-in-

⁵Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, p. 87.

⁶Ibid., p. 89.

Chief (until he was forced to do so in 1865), Davis was intimately involved in the shaping of Confederate strategy throughout the course of the war. His assertion of his command prerogative relegated his Secretaries of War and the War Department to essentially administrative duties.⁷ Davis was, however, unwilling to fully utilize his authority over the various departmental commanders. Although he could order a departmental commander to undertake a certain movement, he felt that the discretion of the local commander should be given paramount consideration. The vast size of the Confederacy meant that in most situations Davis would find himself unable to accurately judge a situation from afar. Indeed, the danger that Richmond could err and misconstrue a distant situation served to limit the authorities in the capital to suggestions and requests to departmental commanders to work towards a particular end.

This balance between local autonomy and unity of command and purpose was thus an underlying source of tension within the departmental system, especially in the West. Throughout the course of the war the problems of command and strategic direction were interwoven with the desire to both preserve the independence of each

⁷June I. Gow, "The Old Army and the Confederacy, 1861-1865", Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts (eds.), Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History from Colonial Times to the Present (Westport, Conn., 1988), pp. 134, 142, 144-147.

department so as not to impair its strategic purpose and at the same time allow the system to work to provide the most efficient use of the comparatively weaker amount of Southern manpower. The departmental system, then, was a method intended to provide control of widely scattered Rebel forces at both the local and the strategic levels.

There were other important reasons for this widespread military structure. The Confederacy's vast area meant that sources of supply were also widely dispersed. The little industry that did exist was not concentrated, it was to be found throughout the South. The loss of any single area could very well mean the loss of a vital source of raw materials or manufactured goods. Likewise, any loss of territory could reduce the procurement of manpower. The loss of territory could also have a negative effect on existing army strengths by encouraging desertion by men desiring to return home to protect their families. A locally recruited and supplied army would also have the added incentive of a bureaucratic entity to preserve its own territorial basis for existence.⁸

Other reasons also existed for the adoption of such a system. Probably one of the simplest of these was the continuation of pre-war practices. In the old pre-

⁸Archer Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg (Baton Rouge, 1961), p. 21; Vandiver, Rebel Brass, pp. 14-15, 19-20.

secession army the United States was divided into geographical commands. The Confederate States saw no real reason why this method of command, proven in the past, should not be continued.⁹ More important was the way in which the departmental system served several political necessities. Localistic in outlook, each state within the Confederacy exerted pressure on Richmond to be given a military presence to protect itself from invasion. Each state provided the central government with a supply of soldiers. These soldiers were recruited by the state and at least some of them were also initially equipped by their own state government. It was therefore politically expedient for each region to be officially integrated into a precise military hierarchy.¹⁰ The fear of a slave rebellion also called for a pervasive military presence. Ironically, the slave holding states had grown accustomed to a central government with military resources which were greater than that of any single state. These states were now unwilling to accept less from Richmond than they had formerly received from Washington.¹¹

⁹Ulysses S. Grant III, "Military Strategy of the Civil War", Military Affairs, Vol. XXII, No. 1 (1958), p. 16.

¹⁰For an explicit examination of this problem see Frank L. Owsley, "Local Defense and the Overthrow of the Confederacy: A Study in State Rights", Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. XI, No. 4 (1925), pp. 490-525.

¹¹Russel F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (New York, 1973), p. 97.

The hope for European recognition of the Confederate States as an independent nation also argued for a widespread military establishment. The administration in Richmond knew that if it was to be able to demonstrate the viability of the Confederacy it would have to be seen to be able to have a military presence throughout its territorial claims.¹²

It was in the region west of the Appalachians and east of the Mississippi River that the war would be won or lost. Although Richmond was the head of the Confederate States, the West was the heart. Here lay the centre of Confederate rail and river lines which formed the vital Southern communications network. The main east-west rail lines in the South ran through this region, as did the waterborne highways of the Mississippi, Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. Here too lay the heart of the Southern war industries. Already, by the summer of 1861, a number of fledgling manufacturing centres had sprung into being to supply the expanding Rebel armies. The Sycamore Powder Mill near Nashville provided the Tennessee State Forces with a vital source of gunpowder, although until September, 1861 its output was under five hundred pounds per day.¹³ Northwest of Nashville the narrow strip of

¹²Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, p. 20.

¹³Frank E. Vandiver, Ploughshares into Swords: Josiah Gorgas and Confederate Ordnance (Austin, Texas, 1952), p. 75.

land between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers on the Tennessee-Kentucky border provided an important source of raw iron. Here in 1860 thirty-five ironmaking establishments had turned out 5144 tons of bar iron.¹⁴ In Louisiana, manufacturers in New Orleans were busy answering a call from the Quartermaster Department for 1500 sets of clothing each week.¹⁵ Former Federal arsenals in Nashville, Baton Rouge, Montgomery, Mount Vernon and Augusta produced accouterments, and if supplied with powder, cartridges.¹⁶

As the war continued, new and increasingly vital sources of military production would be developed. In central Alabama, Selma became a centre for the production of iron, artillery and ammunition. In 1864 half the artillery and two-thirds of the ammunition used by the South came from this region. Northern Alabama also developed as a centre for the production of iron. During the war the mines and furnaces of this region developed the capability of producing 30000 tons of pig iron and 10000 tons of bar iron per year.¹⁷

¹⁴Benjamin F. Cooling, Forts Henry and Donelson - The Key to the Confederate Heartland (Knoxville, 1987), p. 30.

¹⁵Richard D. Goff, Confederate Supply (Durham, N.C., 1969), p. 16.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Thomas L. Connelly, Army of the Heartland, The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1862 (Baton Rouge, 1967), p. 5.

It was as a source of foodstuffs, however, that the heartland region was of the greatest importance. The fertile Nashville Basin in Middle Tennessee and the Tennessee River Valley in East Tennessee produced a disproportionate amount of the West's corn, wheat and hogs. Further to the south the similarly fertile Mississippi Delta and the Alabama Black Belt were in 1861 still planted predominately in cotton but they held the potential to also be a valuable source of subsistence supplies.¹⁸

The West was also the region that would see the greatest strains in the departmental structure of command. Far removed from Tennessee and Mississippi, the government in Virginia was unable to effectively supervise the operations of the various armies in the western departments. Yet as these armies were always at a numerical disadvantage when compared to their Federal opponents close co-operation was necessary to maximize their effective defensive use.

Throughout most of 1861 and 1862 the departmental structure in the West was improvised. The system was gradually enlarged to encompass all the territory in the region but its evolution was often erratic. Nevertheless, by the winter of 1861-1862, a system was in place to

¹⁸Sam B. Hilliard, Atlas of Antebellum Southern Agriculture (Baton Rouge, 1984), pp. 50, 61, 66, 71.

provide a framework for strategic operations. The first Union offensive, however, proved the system to be unsound. The numerous departments throughout the West produced a variety of conflicts between competing departmental commanders, and co-operation often proved difficult to achieve between the various commands.

An effort to change this took place in November of 1862. The creation of the Department of the West came about as an attempt to provide unity to the three main western commands. This department, which showed the potential of a supervisory command in the West, finally collapsed the following year due to the shortcomings of its commander and of the initial terms of its establishment. The system that then emerged from the ruins of the Department of the West was a return to the improvisational structure of 1862. Although the War Department showed more initiative in providing some directions for the development of western strategy the system still relied to a dangerous degree on ad hoc planning.

The year 1864 saw the departmental system's greatest success, but its worst drawbacks also became apparent. In the fall of that year Davis tried to again reform the system and bring back a supervisory command as had been tried before with the Department of the West. Again, however, problems of personalities and poorly defined

terms of command served to undercut the effectiveness of this effort.

Through the course of four years of war, attempts to provide the West with an effective command structure continued on unabated. During this time, the system had both its periods of success and of failure. In the end, however, Davis' inability to overcome the conflict between local autonomy and the need for unity of command reflected the larger issue of the failure of the Southern war effort as a whole.

Chapter II

A TIME OF IMPROVISATION

2.1 THE SYSTEM EMERGES

The war in the West had hesitant beginnings. The first military concentrations which existed in the West were scattered and localistic in function, consisting for the most part of troops undergoing training in camps of instruction. The only command worthy of a departmental designation was that of Major General David Twiggs. His Department No. 1 was established on May 27, 1861 primarily for the defense of New Orleans. It encompassed all of Louisiana and the part of Mississippi south of the 31st parallel and west of the Pascagoula and the Chickasawha Rivers.¹ Ironically, Department No. 1 served mainly as a recruiting ground for other commands; by mid-1861 of 8000 men raised and armed by the department 5400 were serving outside of its boundaries.²

In Tennessee the forces raised by the state were not immediately taken into the Confederate army and were

¹William F. Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War (New York, 1961), Vol. I, p. 188.

²John D. Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1963), p. 28.

initially spread throughout Middle and West Tennessee. Because of delays in transferring the Tennessee State Army to Confederate control the majority of the recruits remained in their training camps. The few regiments which had been concentrated were situated to defend the Mississippi River.³

On the west side of the Mississippi political infighting between the Governor of Arkansas and Confederate authorities resulted in complete chaos. Determined to retain control over the troops raised in Arkansas, Governor Rector refused to allow any Arkansas recruits to enter the Confederate Army unless he was given a guarantee that the transfer was done only after the men in question had given their personal consent. As well, he demanded that any troops previously armed by Arkansas be used only for the specific defense of their home state. When the War Department authorities refused to agree to these stipulations Rector allowed the regiments already in existence to disband. The result was that by mid-July only five regiments of infantry, one battalion of cavalry, and four artillery batteries had been transferred to Confederate jurisdiction.⁴

³Connelly, Army of the Heartland, pp. 27-30.

⁴Michael B. Dougan, Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime (University, Ala., 1976), pp. 75-79; Nathaniel C. Hughes, General William J. Hardee: Old Reliable (Baton Rouge, 1965), pp. 75-77.

Only in western Florida was there any established military body of a substantial size. Pensacola had been an armed camp ever since the Southern seizure on January 12, 1861, two days after Florida's secession, of the United States Navy Yard located on Pensacola Bay. Brigadier General Braxton Bragg, who arrived in March, had been continually reinforced and by April he commanded 1100 men with 5000 more on the way. Although in the following months a number of troops were dispatched to Virginia this small army was a mainstay of Confederate military power on the Gulf Coast.⁵

Nevertheless, during the summer of 1861 measures were begun to provide the West with a proper military structure. On June 17 William Hardee was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and given command of Arkansas north of the Arkansas River and west of the line of the White and the Black Rivers. At this time, though, the War Department could only promise him one regiment, any additional units he would have to try to salvage from the wreckage of the rapidly disbanding Arkansas State Army.⁶

⁵Grady McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat (New York, 1969), pp. 164, 177.

⁶The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. III, pp. 589-590. Hereinafter cited as Official Records, with all references to Series I unless otherwise noted; Hughes, General William J. Hardee, p. 74; Dougan, Confederate Arkansas, pp. 76-77.

More importantly, one week later the War Department took steps to strengthen the situation along the Mississippi. In early June Leonidas Polk, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana, had travelled to Virginia to visit the Louisiana troops serving in that state. While in Richmond, he met with President Davis to convey the concerns of Westerners that something be done to properly protect the Tennessee frontier and specifically to urge that Albert Sidney Johnston be appointed to command in this region. Davis, a personal friend of both Polk and Johnston, readily agreed with both of these pleas. But, as Johnston was presently trying to reach the Confederacy from his previous Federal posting in California, Davis, on June 25, appointed Polk as temporary commander of the newly created Department No. 2.⁷ Not surprisingly, as Polk's main concerns had arisen from a fear of a Northern invasion along the Mississippi River, the new department was structured to deal with exactly such a threat. It included Tennessee west of, and Alabama north of, the Tennessee River; as well as the river counties of Arkansas and Mississippi, the river parishes of Louisiana north of the Red River, and the northeast section of Arkansas north and east of the Black and the White Rivers.⁸

⁷Joseph H. Parks, General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A.: The Fighting Bishop (Baton Rouge, 1962), pp. 166-167; Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, p. 188.

⁸Official Records, Vol. IV, p. 362.

The creation of Department No. 2 brought a large part of the troops being raised in Tennessee under Confederate control. What it did not do was establish a coherent defense structure for the Confederate northern front in the West. After the Confederate victory at Wilson's Creek on August 10 gave the Southerners the strategic initiative in Missouri, the exploitation of this victory proved to be beyond Southern command capabilities. While personality clashes between Polk and his subordinate Pillow caused some of the problems the bulk of the difficulties arose from the tangled command structure. Hardee, along with virtually all of the troops raised in Arkansas, was not under Polk's control. Polk proved therefore to be reluctant to commit his troops to an offensive he could not control. Misinformed of Southern strength on the west side of the river he refused to order Pillow to aid Hardee, instead only telling him to co-operate if possible. The result was that Hardee, who had already pressed forward into southern Missouri, was forced to call off any further offensive action. Perhaps it was just as well. Left without proper direction from above, Pillow had shown himself to be unwilling to co-operate with anybody. While Hardee sat at Greenville, Missouri requesting Pillow's aid for an advance on Ironton, Pillow had resolutely maintained that the proper objective should be Cape Girardeau. The result was a stalemate that only

ended with Polk's decision to call off the attempted offensive. Further to the west the victors of Wilson's Creek also did not properly manage their troops. Price, in command of the Missouri State Guard, was not trusted by Ben McCulloch, commander of the Confederate forces; thus the former struck out on his own into his native State. Neither tried to act in concert with the other Rebel forces in Arkansas.⁹

The limited jurisdiction of Department No. 2 also led to problems in Middle and East Tennessee. This region remained under the military control of the Governor of Tennessee, Isham Harris. Harris accomplished little towards preparing the military defenses of his command. Like Polk, he saw the primary Union threat as coming down the Mississippi River; accordingly, he relied on Kentucky's neutrality to protect the rest of Tennessee's northern border. Kentucky had been badly split over the issue of secession and the Federal government's threat of forced reunification. Governor Magoffin, himself pro-secessionist, had tried to achieve a compromise between the two opposing factions and declared Kentucky to be neutral, forbidding either of the two belligerents from placing any troops in the Bluegrass State. As long as

⁹John M. Harrel, "Arkansas", Clement A. Evans (ed.), Confederate Military History (1989, rpr. New York, 1962), Vol. X, pp. 57-58, 65-66; Hughes, General William J. Hardee, pp. 79-80; Connelly, Army of the Heartland.

this neutrality held, Tennessee's northern border was safe; but at the same time there was widespread recognition that the situation could suddenly change. Nevertheless, Harris chose to ignore this eventuality and neglected to put his defensive house in order in Middle Tennessee.¹⁰

In East Tennessee Harris compounded this neglect by sacrificing military needs to short-term political gains. Fearful of upsetting his re-election chances by antagonizing the Unionists of the Tennessee Valley, Harris pursued a conciliatory policy in the region by downplaying Tennessee's links with the Confederacy and refusing to allow any Confederate troops to enter East Tennessee. Only after his re-election on August 8, 1861 did he begin to deal with the rising threat of Tory activities and establish a military presence.¹¹

The confusion over command in the West finally began to be resolved in early September. The convoluted chain of command which had led to the abortive advance in Missouri was simplified when the Second Department was expanded on September 2 to include all of Arkansas and any

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 39-40, 43-44; R. M. Kelly, "Holding Kentucky for the Union", Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (1887, rpr. New York, 1956), Vol. I, pp. 373-374.

¹¹Connelly, Army of the Heartland, pp. 41-43.

military operations in Missouri.¹² A further extensive restructuring of the Department became possible a few days later. Albert Sidney Johnston arrived in Richmond after a six week anabasis from California through the deserts of the Southwest and immediately met with Jefferson Davis who offered him the command of the West. Upon his acceptance orders were issued by the War Department giving him the rank of General, second in precedence only to the Adjutant-General Samuel Cooper, and assigning him as the head of Department No. 2. At the same time the department's boundaries were dramatically expanded. Johnston's new jurisdiction included all of Tennessee and Arkansas, Mississippi west of the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad and the Mississippi Central Railroad, as well as military operations in Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas and the Indian Territory.¹³

The inclusion of military operations in Kentucky reflected the recent fait accompli presented to the authorities in Richmond by Major General Polk. On the 1st of September, in response to reports that the Federals under Brigadier General U. S. Grant planned to disregard Kentucky's neutrality and occupy Columbus, Kentucky, Polk decided to seize the initiative. He first sent a message

¹²Official Records, Vol. IV, p. 399.

¹³William P. Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston (New York, 1898), pp. 291-292; Official Records, Vol. IV, p. 405.

to Governor Magoffin asking as to what were "the future plans and policy of the Southern Party in Kentucky". Then, without waiting for a reply, Polk ordered the occupation of Columbus.¹⁴

The reaction of both the War Department and of the Governor of Tennessee was one of profound disapproval. Harris, perceiving that Polk's action had destroyed the protection from a Northern invasion enjoyed by Middle and East Tennessee, wired to the commander of the Second Department that if at all possible the Southern troops should be instantly withdrawn.¹⁵ At the same time Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker also ordered Polk to promptly retreat from Kentucky. Both of these messages, however, only reached Polk after his troops had already reached Columbus on the 7th.¹⁶ Polk's actions indicated the complete absence of any long term policy on Kentucky's neutrality. It also indicated the degree to which Richmond had neglected to direct the affairs in the West, allowing each commander to act in ways in which they hoped to gain a local advantage, even at the cost of disrupting more important strategic considerations. All Davis could do

¹⁴Parks, General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A., pp. 180-181; Official Records, Vol. IV, p. 179.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 180, 188-189. A similar message was also sent to Davis.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 180; Parks, General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A., p. 182.

was concur with Polk that "the necessity justifies the action".¹⁷

Johnston's appointment, it was hoped, would provide the unity of command so desperately needed in the West. His authority was described as "imperial in extent, his discretion in military movements was unlimited, and his powers were as large as the theory of the Confederate Government permitted".¹⁸ In mid-September Johnston arrived in Tennessee to take his post as the head of Department No. 2. However, his authority was much more in evidence than were the means to carry out his purposes. To hold a front of 430 miles he had only 23000 troops to oppose 37000 Northerners.¹⁹ The Rebel main line was pierced by several potential lines of attack. To the west the Mississippi River was already strongly fortified, but on neither the Cumberland nor the Tennessee Rivers had any protective measures been undertaken. In Kentucky, only General Simon Buckner's small force of 5000 men stood at Bowling Green on the line of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. Finally, in the east the vital Cumberland Gap region had only been approved for occupation one day

¹⁷Official Records, Vol. IV, p. 181.

¹⁸Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston, p. 306.

¹⁹Peter F. Walker, "Building a Tennessee Army: Autumn 1861", Tennessee Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1957), pp. 103-104.

before Johnston's arrival in Tennessee.²⁰

Johnston immediately set about strengthening his front line. Under the orders of September 10 he could only "call for" troops from Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi; he could not order new forces to be raised. Accordingly, Tennessee was asked to provide an additional 30000 men and Mississippi and Arkansas were each asked for 10000. The results of these requests were far from promising. Mississippi eventually sent out four regiments and Tennessee raised three new regiments by mid-November, but of more significance was the War Department's reaction to Johnston's requests. In a letter sent on the 16th of October the Secretary of War disapproved Johnston's requisition on Mississippi and restricted any future recruiting calls to Arkansas and Tennessee.²¹

In spite of these setbacks Johnston strove to organize his department. Hardee's small command in northeastern Arkansas was ordered to cross the Mississippi and reinforce Buckner at Bowling Green, the complaints of Arkansas politicians notwithstanding. Brigadier General Felix Zollicoffer, commanding in East Tennessee, was given permission to advance beyond Cumberland Gap into eastern

²⁰Ibid., pp. 104-105; Vincent J. Esposito (ed.), The West Point Atlas of the Civil War (New York, 1962), Map 25. The exact Confederate strength at this time is at best an estimate.

²¹Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston, pp. 335-337.

Kentucky.²² These moves into Kentucky, however, continued a dangerous dispersal of the Confederates in a cordon defense. This was partly the result of simply continuing previous strategic dispositions, but can also be blamed on the need to defend a department that was forced to draw on recruiting grounds and food producing areas located immediately behind the front line. For example, instead of placing the centre of his line behind the Cumberland River at Nashville, Johnston was forced to remain at Bowling Green to protect the vital agricultural region to the north of and the iron producing centres to the northwest of the Tennessee capital. In addition, virtually all of Johnston's troops came from the Volunteer State. As of September, Tennessee had thirty regiments on the western line; in comparison only three other states had contributed a total of seven regiments.²³ Until February of 1862 the only organized units Johnston was able to obtain from outside his department was a small division transferred from south-western Virginia.²⁴

At the same time, the War Department continued to

²²Hughes, General William J. Hardee, pp. 81-82; Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston, pp. 349, 355-356.

²³Connelly, Army of the Heartland, pp. 10, 64.

²⁴John M. Belohlavek, "John B. Floyd and the West Virginia Campaign of 1862", West Virginia History, Vol. XXIX, No. 3 (1968), p. 291; Official Records, Vol. VII, pp. 779, 820.

establish a proper military structure over the rest of the West. A new department, the Department of Alabama and West Florida, was created with the objective of supporting the army at Pensacola. Bragg's restricted area of command around Pensacola was enlarged on October 14, 1861 to include responsibility for the entire State of Alabama and of Florida west of the Choctawhatchee River.²⁵ This expansion of Bragg's responsibilities was in reaction to news that a Federal naval expedition was about to set sail. Fearful that the Gulf Coast was to be the target of this movement Bragg was accordingly given the task of its defense. Work on a new railroad line linking Mobile with Pensacola was rapidly nearing completion. This new line would allow Mobile to be reinforced in much less time from western Florida than from eastern Louisiana.²⁶ Furthermore, as Bragg continued to build up his army he needed to be able to draw on a larger area for logistical support. Mobile lay at the southern terminus of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad and at the mouths of the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers. All three of these transportation routes offered direct access to the rich Black Belt region of central Alabama.

²⁵Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 752.

²⁶Ibid., p. 764. This naval expedition was in fact directed to land on the North Carolina shore. Robert C. Black III, The Railroads of the Confederacy (Chapel Hill, 1952), pp. 75-76.

The effect of the rapid expansion of military authority in the creation of three large departments was to establish a cordon defense around a huge perimeter. In January of 1862 the Department of Alabama and West Florida had approximately 18000 men guarding the Gulf Coast. In Department No. 1 another 10000 were defending the river approaches to New Orleans. In Department No. 2 the 70000 men that were available to Albert Sidney Johnston were dispersed on a front that stretched from the Cumberland Gap in the Appalachian Mountains to the western borders of Arkansas and Missouri. Yet co-ordination between the departments was left up to each of the departmental commanders. Additionally, the dispositions of troops within each department and the strategy as to how to use these forces was not dictated by Richmond.²⁷ Indeed, even when Davis was appealed to directly by an emissary sent to Richmond by Johnston he refused to agree to order areas not under any immediate threat to reinforce the Tennessee line and declared that Johnston must rely on his own resources.²⁸

The only exception to this general rule of neglect by the War Department was the appointment of Major General

²⁷Thomas L. Livermore, Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America 1861-1865 (1900, rpr. Bloomington, Ind., 1957), pp. 42-43; Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 52-53.

²⁸Stanley F. Horn, The Army of Tennessee (Norman, Okla., 1941), p. 60.

Van Dorn to command the forces in the northern Trans-Mississippi. After Johnston ordered Hardee's transfer to Kentucky from Arkansas he had largely ignored this part of his department. In the absence of any instructions from the departmental commander the Confederates in Arkansas and Missouri had become involved in endless squabbles over their authority. After the Southern victory at Wilson's Creek in Missouri in August, 1861, troops under Price had struck deep into their home state. McCulloch, in command of the balance of the victorious Rebels, had refused to co-operate and Price was soon forced to leave Missouri. The War Department asked McCulloch for an explanation of his inaction, but then did not act to solve the problems in this region until November. When Davis finally sought to improve the situation and proposed to appoint a non-Missourian to command in the northern Trans-Mississippi the Missourians raised endless objections.²⁹ Finally, on January 16, 1862, Davis settled upon putting Major General Van Dorn in command. Van Dorn had made his reputation on the frontier before the war and was widely respected for his military prowess on both sides of the Mississippi. He was put in charge of the Trans-Mississippi District of Department No. 2 , a region made up of Louisiana north of the Red River, the Indian Territory, Arkansas and most of

²⁹Robert G. Hartje, Van Dorn: The Life and Times of a Confederate General (Nashville, 1967), pp. 102-103; Dougan, Confederate Arkansas, pp. 85-86.

Missouri.³⁰

Van Dorn immediately left for Arkansas, pausing only briefly to consult with Johnston. His exact orders were vague. Davis later wrote that Van Dorn was to "effect a diversion in favour of General Johnston".³¹ No record exists of what Johnston wanted Van Dorn to do in Arkansas. As it turned out Van Dorn more or less did as he saw best without any directions from his departmental superior.³² Thus, by the end of January, 1861 a structured military establishment had been extended over virtually all of the West. It remained to be seen, however, how well this system would stand the stress and strain of the coming Union offensives.

³⁰Hartje, Van Dorn, p. 104; Official Records, Vol. VIII, p. 734.

³¹Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (New York, 1881), Vol. II, p. 51.

³²Hartje, Van Dorn, p. 105.

2.2 FORT HENRY TO CORINTH

The lack of strategic direction in the West was nowhere more obviously exhibited than by the dispositions of Johnston's forces in Kentucky and Tennessee. As Federal strength continued to mount Johnston held firm to his policy of a cordon defense. Johnston, based in Bowling Green, had a minimum of contact with his subordinates on either flank. Moreover, even after the troops in eastern Kentucky were routed in the Battle of Mill Springs he refused to countenance a strategic concentration of his command. General P. G. T. Beauregard, newly transferred from Virginia, unsuccessfully urged Johnston to abandon Bowling Green and join with him in forming a single column which would then link up with the garrisons of Forts Henry and Donelson.³³ Beauregard's fears of being defeated in detail were realized on the 6th of February 1862 when the centre of the Confederate line was broken by the surrender of Fort Henry. The damage was made even worse when ten days later between 16500 and 17500 Southern troops were surrendered with the fall of Fort Donelson.³⁴ With the Kentucky line destroyed, Johnston began a long retreat into Middle Tennessee.

³³T. Harry Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard, Napoleon in Gray (Baton Rouge, 1955), p. 117.

³⁴Cooling, Forts Henry and Donelson, p. 216. The exact number that surrendered is uncertain.

The sudden disasters in Department No. 2 galvanized the War Department into action. As early as February 8, just two days after the fall of Fort Henry, Secretary of War Judah Benjamin began to send out orders for the reinforcement of Tennessee.³⁵ General Lovell, commanding Department No. 1 after Twigg's retirement, was ordered to send 5000 men to Polk at Columbus.³⁶ Bragg, who on his own initiative had already dispatched some of his own troops to aid Johnston, was told to send all the men he could spare to Knoxville to help rebuild Confederate fortunes in East Tennessee. In addition, Benjamin told Johnston that four regiments would be forthcoming from Virginia and several more from North Carolina.³⁷

When the magnitude of the Confederate defeat at Fort Donelson became apparent, Richmond adopted an even more extensive plan of concentration. Bragg, who had already urged that only important strategic points on the Gulf Coast should be held, was ordered to abandon Pensacola and only hold Mobile with a minimal garrison.³⁸ The War Department also sought out spare troops in Texas. The Texas coast was ordered to be evacuated except for

³⁵Benjamin took over as Secretary of War after Leroy Walker's resignation on September 16, 1861.

³⁶Official Records, Vol. VI, p. 823.

³⁷McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat, p. 199; Official Records, Vol. VI, pp. 823, 862.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 826, 828.

artillery, and the men thus available sent to reinforce Van Dorn.³⁹

Beauregard, commanding in West Tennessee, designated Corinth, Mississippi as the concentration point for the converging Rebel forces. Corinth was situated at the junction of the Mobile and Ohio and the Memphis and Charleston Railroads. The Mobile and Ohio provided a direct route between Polk in western Kentucky, Corinth, and Bragg in the Pensacola and Mobile area. The Memphis and Charleston was the only lateral route in Tennessee between Memphis and Chattanooga. It linked Johnston in Middle Tennessee with Corinth, and due west of Corinth it intersected with the railroad leading north from New Orleans.⁴⁰ Corinth also was only twenty-five miles southwest of Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River where on March 13 Grant began to land the advance of his Army of the Tennessee.⁴¹

In spite of the urgency of the situation the Confederate buildup was slow. On the 23rd of February Johnston had fallen back as far as Murfreesboro, Tennessee. There he united his troops from Bowling Green with the remnants of the East Tennessee command. This

³⁹Ibid., p. 830.

⁴⁰Black, Railroads of the Confederacy, p. 6.

⁴¹Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston, p. 528.

reorganization took time, and so he did not arrive at Corinth until the 25th of the following month.⁴² Polk too, reluctantly withdrew from his position at Columbus. After sending 7000 men under Major General McCown to defend the Mississippi River at Island No. 10 he slowly marched south along the line of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, arriving within supporting distance of Corinth in the third week of March.⁴³

The reinforcements from Department No. 1 and those of General Bragg were only part of the response to the call for reinforcements. Beauregard, in charge of the concentrating forces at Corinth in the absence of Johnston, sought to further increase the Confederate army at this point. Van Dorn, whose army was retreating from northwest Arkansas after its defeat at Pea Ridge on March 7 and 8, was ordered to move to within supporting distance of Beauregard. Van Dorn began marching to eastern Arkansas on the 17th of March. He proposed to aid Beauregard by "giving battle to the enemy near New Madrid", but these plans were cut short when he was specifically ordered to abandon Arkansas and shift to Memphis. His movements, however, were slowed by inclement weather and the Army of the West, as Van Dorn had titled his command, only arrived in Corinth on the last day of

⁴²Ibid., pp. 508, 529.

⁴³Horn, The Army of Tennessee, pp. 111, 119.

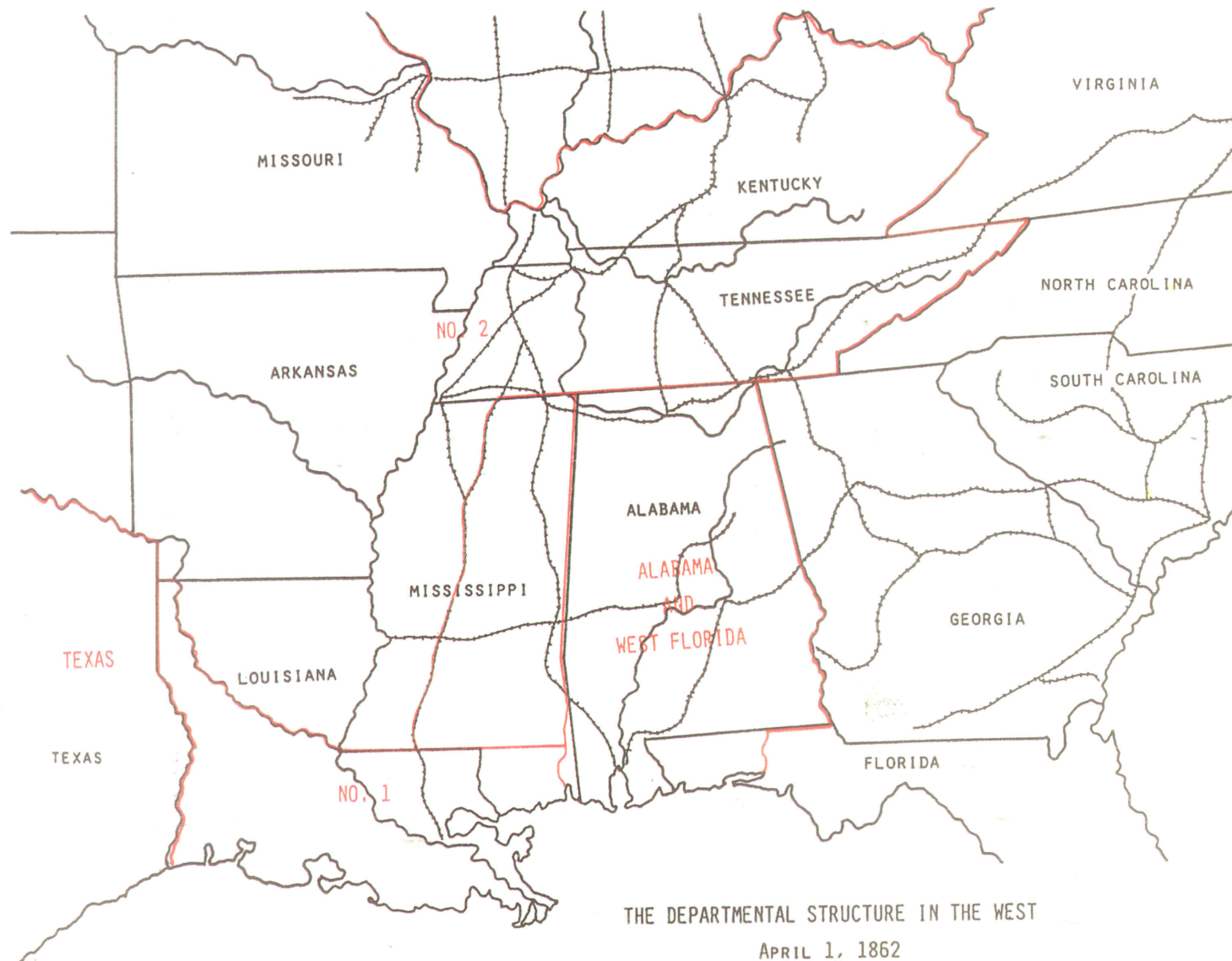
April.⁴⁴ Louisiana was also asked to contribute more reinforcements to the northern front. A call was put out for an additional five and one-half regiments. In response a number of state militia regiments as well as several regular units were dispatched to Corinth. The militia units were to serve only for a ninety day period; nevertheless by mid-April 3000 new Louisiana troops were serving in the Army of the Mississippi.⁴⁵

In order to strengthen the Confederate flank in East Tennessee General Edmund Kirby Smith was sent from Virginia to take up a new command in Knoxville. Although he was ordered to report to Johnston on his activities he was largely given a free hand to defend the region.⁴⁶ Upon his arrival Kirby Smith found that his command consisted of only 8000 men, the majority twelve-month volunteers whose terms were about expire. In desperation Kirby Smith appealed to Governor Joseph E. Brown of Georgia for arms and men to defend Chattanooga. Jefferson Davis also added his weight to this request, instructing the War Department to extend the appeal for troops to the Governor of Alabama. By the end of March several Georgia

⁴⁴Hartje, Van Dorn, pp. 166, 168, 171; Thomas L. Snead, "The First Year of the War in Missouri", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, p. 277.

⁴⁵Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana, p. 80. The forces at Corinth were designated the Army of the Mississippi in early March, 1862.

⁴⁶Official Records, Vol. VII, p. 908.



regiments had arrived in East Tennessee, giving Kirby Smith enough strength to be able to secure his district.⁴⁷ He was in fact even able to send a small brigade to Corinth in early April.⁴⁸

The concentration to oppose the Federal offensive in Tennessee was the first test of the departmental structure. As a result several strengths and weaknesses were revealed. The geographical limitations of the system encouraged a cordon defence, although the departmental system cannot be held responsible for Johnston's problematic deployment in his own department. Yet a wide dispersion of troops between various commands could be overcome by a rapid concentration when the enemy's intentions became clear. But for this to work a strong guiding hand was needed in Richmond in order to bring about compliance from potentially recalcitrant departmental commanders. While Davis, Benjamin, and George Randolph had indeed provided this guidance it should be noted that this was done on an ad hoc basis in response to a crisis; no strategic plan existed in advance.⁴⁹ The strategy of concentration nevertheless

⁴⁷Joseph Parks, General Edmund Kirby Smith C.S.A. (Baton Rouge, 1954), pp. 157, 162; Official Records, Vol. X, Part 2, pp. 354, 358.

⁴⁸Parks, General Edmund Kirby Smith C.S.A., pp. 168-169.

⁴⁹George Randolph, the third Secretary of War to serve under Davis, assumed his position on March 22, 1862.

almost came to a successful conclusion. Unfortunately for the South tactical blunders in the Battle of Shiloh on April 6 and 7 denied the Confederates the victory they so badly needed. During the fighting, General Johnston was killed and Beauregard replaced him at the head of the Army of the Mississippi.⁵⁰

After Shiloh the Federal forces in the West were brought together in a counter-concentration against the Rebel army at Corinth. To a certain degree this relieved the uncertainty the Confederates had faced over Federal strategic intentions. With the Federal line of advance limited to one direction the Southern command structure could be revised to take into account this new reality. This revision, however, was done haltingly and served more to ratify a strategic deployment that was already an established fact. The first change dealt with the region west of the Mississippi. The arrival at Corinth of Van Dorn's Army of the West meant that the Trans-Mississippi was left virtually denuded of any Confederate troops. The Federal army that had defeated Van Dorn at Pea Ridge began to slowly advance into central Arkansas; by May it was

⁵⁰The reasons for the Confederate loss of what, on the first day of fighting, appeared to be a Southern victory has been a point of contention from 1862 on. For a new look at this issue, which places the blame on Beauregard's mistaken order to withdraw, see Grady McWhiney, "General Beauregard's 'Complete Victory' at Shiloh: An Interpretation", The Journal of Southern History, Vol. XLIX, No. 3 (1982), pp. 421-434.

only fifty miles from Little Rock. Governor Rector, desperate to draw Richmond's attention to his state's plight, went so far as to threaten secession from the Confederacy. In addition, four prominent Arkansans, including two members of the Confederate Congress, petitioned Davis for the creation of a separate department west of the Mississippi.⁵¹ Meanwhile a delegation went directly to Beauregard to seek his help. In a separate effort to provide some leadership for the beleaguered state on May 26 Beauregard appointed Major General Thomas Hindman to command the Trans-Mississippi District of Department No. 2.⁵²

Arkansas was not alone in its calls for something to be done for the region west of the river. In Louisiana the fall of New Orleans in mid-April was seen as the direct result of the removal from Department No. 1 of troops to aid the army at Corinth. When the Federal flotilla finally broke through the Confederate river defenses south of the city on the early morning of April 24 only 3000 troops, all of them raw militia, remained in the department.⁵³ Furthermore, Farragut's naval operations along the Mississippi threatened to cut all

⁵¹Harrell, "Arkansas", pp. 99-100.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 103-104; Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana, p. 84; Official Records, Vol. VI, p. 513.

⁵³Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana, p. 84; Official Records, Vol. VI, p. 513.

lines of communication between eastern and western Louisiana, as well as between northern Louisiana and Mississippi. Alarmed at these events, Governor Moore of Louisiana suggested to Davis that the area west of the Mississippi be placed under a separate command.⁵⁴

On May 26, the same day that Beauregard assigned Hindman to command in Arkansas, Richmond created the Trans-Mississippi Department and placed Brigadier General Paul Hébert, up until then in charge of the now superceded Department of Texas, in temporary command. The new department included Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, the Indian Territory, and the State of Louisiana west of the Mississippi River.⁵⁵ In spite of the potential dangers of the overlapping jurisdictions of the two generals the new department appeared to function smoothly for the time. As he was only in temporary command of the department Hébert refrained from exercising his full authority, and Hindman at Little Rock and Hébert at Houston functioned independently of each other for the time being.

At the same time as the Trans-Mississippi Department was established a reorganization of the departments between the Mississippi and the Appalachians became more and more necessary. Increasing Northern pressure against the Rebel entrenchments at Corinth made a Confederate

⁵⁴Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 805.

⁵⁵Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 713.

retreat deeper into northern Mississippi a likely possibility.⁵⁶ Yet a difficulty existed in the fact that any move to the south would take Beauregard outside of the boundaries of his department. While Department No. 2 encompassed Mississippi west of the Mississippi Central and the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroads, to the immediate south of Corinth Beauregard's jurisdiction was limited to include only "Corinth, Mississippi, and the country adjacent thereto, and extending to Eastport on [the] Tennessee River".⁵⁷ The Army of the Mississippi was also constrained by the loss of much of its territory in Middle Tennessee and the severance of the rail link to East Tennessee.

The southern boundary of the Second Department had also proven to be a source of difficulty at Vicksburg. This river city was well inside Department No. 2, but since the fall of New Orleans it had become the primary defensive position to block any Union advance up the Mississippi from the south. But this was the strategic responsibility of Department No. 1 and jurisdictional problems had soon surfaced. On May 18 Farragut's Union gunboats appeared below Vicksburg. To reinforce Brigadier General M. L. Smith's meager force of several artillery

⁵⁶Ibid., Vol. X, Part 2, p. 530.

⁵⁷Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, pp. 188-189.

batteries and a lone infantry regiment several new units were sent to the city; included among these reinforcements were two regiments from Department No. 1. Major General Mansfield Lovell, in command of the First Department, accompanied these regiments. Three days later Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles arrived from Corinth with orders from Beauregard placing him in charge of operations at Vicksburg.⁵⁸ In order to clear up the situation, Lovell referred the matter to Beauregard, pointing out that it was his understanding that Department No. 1 extended north in Mississippi to the 33rd parallel. Furthermore, Lovell continued, the War Department had always referred to him over matters concerning Jackson and Vicksburg.⁵⁹

Beauregard immediately asked Richmond for an answer to this problem. In reply the same General Orders that established the Trans-Mississippi Department also redefined Departments No. 1 and No. 2. Both jurisdictions lost any responsibility for the region west of the Mississippi River and Mississippi was divided between the two commands along the line of the 33rd parallel.⁶⁰ Thus, both departments were provided with more appropriate geographical parameters in which to fulfill their

⁵⁸Edwin C. Bearss, Rebel Victory at Vicksburg (Little Rock, 1963), p. 46.

⁵⁹Official Records, Vol. XV, pp. 741-742.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 746.

strategic purposes.

The retreat from Corinth that Beauregard had earlier feared soon came to be necessary. General Halleck, in command of a Union army over 100000 strong, slowly closed in around Corinth, threatening to place the Rebels under siege and cut off their lines of communication. While the Confederates would have been able to hold out a long time, inevitably they would have been forced to retreat under disadvantageous conditions or surrender. Beauregard felt that it would be better to retreat in good order while this still was possible. On the last day of May the Southerners began their withdrawal to Tupelo, Mississippi, fifty miles to the south.⁶¹ The loss of Corinth also meant the loss of Memphis, and the last remaining Mississippi fort north of the city was evacuated on the 1st of June.⁶²

The Northern offensives of the spring and summer of 1862 had revealed many flaws in the Rebel departmental system established during the previous winter. The multiplicity of commands had encouraged a dispersal of troops in a cordon defense. It had taken a severe defeat at Forts Henry and Donelson to prompt a concentration of Southern troops. Then the departmental structure had been largely ignored as ad hoc arrangements shifted commands

⁶¹Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard, pp. 153-154.

⁶²Horn, The Army of Tennessee, p. 153.

from one department to another. While serving to meet the emergency, such actions depended on close supervision from the War Department. When this was not always forthcoming conflicts between various jurisdictions became inevitable. If the Confederate hopes to regain their losses were to be realized the system would have to be refined.

2.3 SOUTHERN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

The collapse of all of the Mississippi River positions, except for Vicksburg, was the signal for the powers in Richmond to move against their western commanders. Beauregard was relieved of the leadership of the Army of the Mississippi on June 20 and replaced by Bragg. The day before, Van Dorn had been given Lovell's command.⁶³ At the same time Richmond took steps to ensure that the forces in Mississippi would have a more workable command structure. On June 25, Department No. 2 was expanded to include all of the First Department as well as the Department of Alabama and West Florida, plus that part of Georgia west of a line along the railroad from Chattanooga to Atlanta and then down the Atlanta and West Point Railroad to the Alabama state line.⁶⁴ Several reasons can be given for this restructuring of the western departmental edifice. Van Dorn's assignment to southern Mississippi allowed him to draw on reinforcements from Department No. 1, and he immediately had done so, drawing 6000 men south into his department.⁶⁵ As it was possible that he might need further reinforcements in the future, the easiest way to co-ordinate such a movement was to

⁶³Connelly, Army of the Heartland, pp. 180-182; Bearss, Rebel Victory at Vicksburg, p. 111.

⁶⁴Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, p. 624.

⁶⁵Ibid., Vol. XV, pp. 761-762; Vol. XVII, Part 2, p. 615.

integrate the two commands. Of greater importance was the question of rail lines. Writing on June 24, Bragg pointed out that the only railroad connecting his army with the East ran through Van Dorn's jurisdiction. This problem was now remedied. Finally the enlargement of Department No. 2 ratified the de facto union of this command with the Department of Alabama and West Florida. Bragg had not relinquished his supervision of this region while he was a corps and then departmental commander in a different department. This informal personal union was now made official.⁶⁶

The expanded Department No. 2, now also often referred to as the Western Department, finally consolidated the logistical base of all the manpower that had been present at Shiloh. Not surprisingly, it was at this time the primary army in the West achieved its greatest period of strength.⁶⁷

In the first few weeks after assuming command Bragg proceeded to reorganize both his army and his new department. Each of the two secondary concentrations of troops in the Western Department were given a geographical district to support them. Van Dorn was placed in control of the District of Mississippi in the west of that same

⁶⁶Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, pp. 62-64.

⁶⁷Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 101-103.

state and Brigadier General Forney commanded the garrison at Mobile. His jurisdiction was designated the District of the Gulf and was made up primarily of that part of Alabama south of the 32nd parallel.⁶⁸ The result was to impose a proper military substructure over all of the area under Bragg's rule.

Yet in East Tennessee some problems over jurisdiction remained. Edmund Kirby Smith had in effect quietly seceded from Department No. 2. When he originally took up his position in Tennessee Kirby Smith had assumed that he was in control of the District of East Tennessee in Johnston's department. Then, when Johnston and then Beauregard had been too preoccupied by the problems facing them in the vicinity of Corinth to maintain full contact with East Tennessee, the War Department had begun to refer to Kirby Smith's district as a separate department. When Kirby Smith requested Richmond for clarification of his status, he was told on July 18 that his command was a separate department made up of East Tennessee, North Carolina west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and that part of Georgia north of the railroad from Augusta via Atlanta to West Point on the Alabama boundary.⁶⁹ Only later in July did the fact emerge that Bragg and Kirby Smith had both been assigned the same region in northern Georgia as

⁶⁸Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, p. 636.

⁶⁹Connelly, Army of the Heartland, pp. 187-188.

part of their respective departments. Confused, Bragg inquired of Kirby Smith as to whether or not East Tennessee was a separate department. Determined to maintain his independent command, Kirby Smith replied that his department reported directly to the War Department.⁷⁰

The reorganization of the western commands also presaged hopes of a Confederate offensive to recover what had been lost in the spring of 1862. After the capture of Corinth the Union forces under Halleck were gradually dispersed. In order to strengthen the Union hold on northern Arkansas troops were sent to reinforce the Federal forces in this region. More importantly, however, the Army of the Ohio was reconstituted under Major General Buell and given the task of moving on East Tennessee via Decatur and Chattanooga.⁷¹ Despite some delays Buell was ready to march by June 10, and by the 1st of July he had pushed on to a position which threatened Chattanooga. Here his offensive ground to a halt as Buell found himself at the limit of his transportation lines.⁷²

Yet for the Rebels Buell's movement dangerously threatened their position in the West. It was quite

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 188; Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 624, 627, 651-652.

⁷¹Don Carlos Buell, "East Tennessee and the Campaign of Perryville", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. III, p. 35.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 35-36.

obvious that Kirby Smith, pressed both from the south at Chattanooga and from the north at Cumberland Gap, would be unable to retain his position in East Tennessee unless he was reinforced. Furthermore, should East Tennessee be lost, the vital direct rail line to Virginia would also fall, and the loss of Chattanooga would open the road to Atlanta and the important manufacturing centres in Georgia. Four of the Confederates' eight arsenals-Atlanta, Augusta, Macon and Columbus - were in this region, as well as rich coal, copper, and saltpeter deposits.⁷³

The consolidation of the western departments had, however, also given Bragg the authority he needed to react to these threats. The Secretary of War had already informed Bragg that he could strategically do as he thought best; thus on June 27 Bragg dispatched a small division of 3000 men to aid Kirby Smith.⁷⁴ By the third week in July Bragg's army at Tupelo had been rebuilt and reorganized, discipline was reported as excellent, the older regiments were showing "great skill and promptness" and the newer levies were progressing satisfactorily.⁷⁵ At Vicksburg Van Dorn had been reinforced and seemed to be

⁷³Connelly, Army of the Heartland, pp. 190-191; Vandiver, Ploughshares into Swords, p. 148.

⁷⁴Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp. 701-702, 710.

⁷⁵Ibid., Vol. X, Part 1, p. 781.

able to hold off the Union fleet bombarding the city. The main threat at this point came from the naval forces of Farragut and hopes were high that this could be countered by the ironclad CSS Arkansas nearing completion at Yazoo City.⁷⁶ Changes in the Federal command structure also presented the Rebels with potential advantages. The Union forces in the West were abruptly deprived of their unity of command when Halleck was transferred to Washington and promoted to the position of General-in-Chief, leaving the Federals with three independent lines of operation in the West: one facing south in West Tennessee, one facing east in northern Alabama, and one facing southeast in East Tennessee.⁷⁷

Therefore, Bragg began to examine his strategic options. An offensive into West Tennessee would leave Alabama and Georgia unprotected. To reach West Tennessee would also require moving through a region that had been stripped bare by the occupation of several armies and was also in the midst of a drought. A move into Middle Tennessee would place Bragg between the two Federal armies under Buell and Grant and totally isolate him from the forces under Kirby Smith in East Tennessee. Since at the moment it was East Tennessee that was most threatened the decision was made to shift the bulk of Bragg's command to

⁷⁶Hartje, Van Dorn, pp. 198-199.

⁷⁷Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, p. 104.

Chattanooga.⁷⁸ The transfer in June of McCown's Division had proven such a move to be practical; although it was necessary to take a circuitous route through Mobile only six days were required to arrive in East Tennessee.⁷⁹

On the 21st of July, 1862 orders were issued to begin to transfer the Army of the Mississippi to Chattanooga. Major General Price, commanding the troops previously brought from Arkansas by Van Dorn, was left to take charge of all operations in Mississippi not included in Van Dorn's jurisdiction at Vicksburg. Price was ordered to be prepared to advance his 16000 men into Middle Tennessee as soon as Bragg's offensive further to the east made such an advance possible. If this could not be done, Price was at least to try to prevent any reinforcements from being dispatched against Bragg by the Union forces in West Tennessee.⁸⁰ Finally, since the siege of Vicksburg was lifted on the same day that Bragg's troops began their move, Van Dorn was instructed to act "as he felt it necessary" but to try to consult with and if possible co-

⁷⁸Joseph Wheeler, "Bragg's Invasion of Kentucky", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. III, pp. 2-3; Official Records, Vol. LII, Pt. II, pp. 330-331.

⁷⁹Black, Railroads of the Confederacy, p. 181.

⁸⁰Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 656-657; Thomas Snead, "With Price East of the Mississippi", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. II, pp. 725-726.

operate with Price.⁸¹ But Bragg did not give any specific instructions on how the two commanders were supposed to co-ordinate any of their moves with Bragg's offensive in East Tennessee.⁸²

The transfer of the Army of the Mississippi went well. By July 27 the first of Bragg's regiments rolled into Chattanooga. Four days later Bragg and Kirby Smith met to work out the details of their joint campaign. Although Bragg was the senior officer, he was not commanding in his own department. Kirby Smith was not willing to place himself under Bragg's control, and so the decision was made that Bragg and Kirby Smith would co-operate and work in mutual support. The two armies would operate independently until they united at their objective. Only then would Bragg take overall command.⁸³

Yet almost immediately problems of co-ordinating the two armies began to surface. At Chattanooga the two generals had agreed that Bragg's objective would be Middle Tennessee and Kirby Smith would move to take Cumberland Gap. Then on August 9 Kirby Smith wrote Bragg that he was instead planning to only invest Cumberland Gap with one of his divisions, and would push the rest of his army on into

⁸¹Hartje, Van Dorn, p. 208.

⁸²Connelly, Army of the Heartland, p. 207.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 206-207; Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp. 741, 745-746.

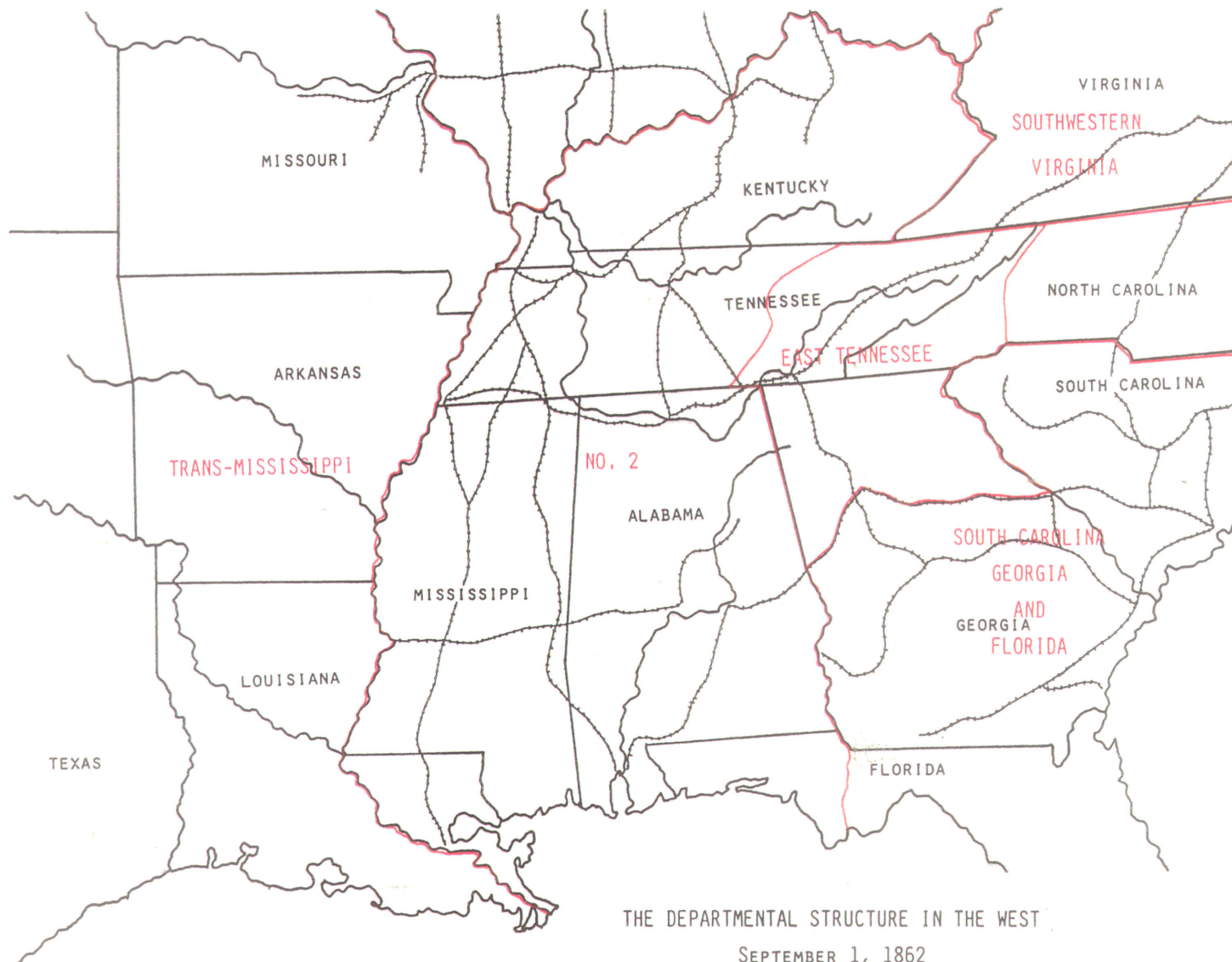
Kentucky.⁸⁴ Bragg, still in Chattanooga awaiting the last of his trains from Mississippi, could only request that Kirby Smith not move too far into Kentucky before he was able to begin his own march northwards.⁸⁵ On the same day, Kirby Smith found another player in the growing plans for the Confederate offensive. Shortly after his meeting with Bragg, Kirby Smith met in Knoxville with Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall, currently commanding a small force of 3000 men in the neighbouring Department of Southwestern Virginia. Marshall agreed that he would hold his troops ready to move on the northern flank of Cumberland Gap when Kirby Smith was himself about to move.⁸⁶

One last force remained to be incorporated into Bragg's and Kirby Smith's offensive plans. General Breckinridge, part of Van Dorn's small army at Vicksburg, had in late July been sent into northern East Louisiana to attempt to capture Baton Rouge. Van Dorn had already attempted to draw Price into this expedition but Bragg disallowed this, reminding Price that his instructions

⁸⁴Parks, General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A., pp. 201-202; Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, p. 748.

⁸⁵Connelly, Army of the Heartland, p. 209.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 207.



were to attempt to move into West and Middle Tennessee.⁸⁷ Breckinridge's assault proved to be a Confederate defeat, although he was able to retreat and establish a stronghold on the Mississippi at Port Hudson.⁸⁸ Bragg then requested that Van Dorn direct Breckinridge to take those troops in his division that were from Tennessee and Kentucky and join the army in Chattanooga.⁸⁹ Breckinridge, a popular Kentuckian, was deemed to be an important political figure sure to gain support for the South if he should re-enter his native state. When he agreed on the 25th of August to join the offensive the invasion plans appeared to be complete.

By the end of August the Confederate offensive had grown and expanded to encompass seven separate forces drawn from three different departments.⁹⁰ Difficulties in co-ordination soon followed. Even within Bragg's

⁸⁷Edwin C. Bearss, "The Battle of Baton Rouge", Louisiana History, Vol. III, No. 2 (1962), pp. 81-82; Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 663-664.

⁸⁸Bearss, "The Battle of Baton Rouge", p. 123. The failure of Breckinridge's assault can probably be attributed to the failure of the CSS Arkansas to provide naval support. The ironclad's engines, never of the best quality, gave out four miles north of Baton Rouge and the ship had to be destroyed by its crew to prevent its capture. Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana, p. 121.

⁸⁹Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, p. 995-996.

⁹⁰Bragg, Price, Van Dorn and Breckinridge from Department No. 2, Kirby Smith, from the Department of East Tennessee, and Marshall from the Department of Southwestern Virginia.

department co-operation between Price, Van Dorn, and the departmental commander was proving to be difficult due to conflicting objectives and the problem of each officer seeing his own immediate needs as his first obligation. The source of most command problems, however, lay in trying to maintain a common objective between Bragg and Kirby Smith. Kirby Smith had, by the end of August, pushed past the Union division at Cumberland Gap and advanced into the Blue Grass region of Kentucky. Bragg himself started to move out of Chattanooga and entered Kentucky in early September.⁹¹ Yet Smith's advance forced Bragg to modify his original plans. To prevent the Federal forces under Buell from hurrying to Kentucky to overwhelm Kirby Smith, Bragg abandoned his scheme to retake Nashville and instead decided to keep his army interposed between Buell and Kirby Smith. If a favourable opportunity arose to defeat Buell, Bragg would attack, otherwise he proposed to only try to maneuver Buell out of Tennessee.⁹²

Bragg ended up marching past Buell's flank into Kentucky as the latter strove to regain his lines of communication with Louisville. The co-operation the two departmental heads had spoken about several weeks earlier

⁹¹Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, p. 75.

⁹²McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat, p. 274.

was not forthcoming. Although Kirby Smith shifted two brigades to Bragg these reinforcements were properly part of the Army of the Mississippi.⁹³ After this Kirby Smith, the commander of the newly designated Army of Kentucky, began to offer excuses for not uniting the two armies. Citing the danger of an Union advance from Cincinnati, Kirby Smith urged Bragg not to denude central Kentucky of so many troops as to leave it unnecessarily exposed.⁹⁴ The result was that Kirby Smith remained separate from Bragg's command even as the Army of the Mississippi was faced with resurgent Union forces.

Co-operation between the other forces involved in the Kentucky campaign was also proving illusory. Humphrey Marshall had been delayed in his move into eastern Kentucky when his departmental commander complained to Richmond of losing his jurisdiction over Marshall. The War Department, apparently ignorant of the arrangement worked out between Marshall and Kirby Smith, did not allow Marshall to move until mid-August.⁹⁵ When Marshall finally did begin to advance, his force remained preoccupied with trying to intercept the retreat of the

⁹³Official Records, Vol XVI, Part 2, p. 844.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 845-846; Connelly, Army of the Heartland, p. 220.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 238.

Federal garrison from Cumberland Gap.⁹⁶

Kirby Smith's problems with Marshall were minor compared to Bragg's relations with the forces in Mississippi. As he left Chattanooga, Bragg had again urged Price and Van Dorn to advance, adding that he was confident they could meet "on the Ohio and there open the way to Missouri".⁹⁷ Yet, apart from two messages to Price in early September and one to Van Dorn late in the same month urging them to march on Nashville, Bragg had no solid instructions for his two subordinates. Although each in turn traded plans, neither of the two seemed likely to co-operate with the other.⁹⁸ Finally, when Van Dorn referred directly to the War Department and requested command over Price to be able to ensure unity of action, Richmond began to realize the extent of the confusion and lack of co-operation between the two commanders in Mississippi. Davis responded by informing Van Dorn that "the troops must co-operate and can only do so by leaving one head. Your rank makes you the commander".⁹⁹ Van Dorn, now sure of unity of command in his endeavours,

⁹⁶Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp. 869-871.

⁹⁷Ibid., Vol. XVII, Part. p. 688.

⁹⁸Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, pp. 76-77.

⁹⁹Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 697-700; Albert Castel, General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West (Baton Rouge, 1968), p. 98.

decided to drive into West Tennessee, although by doing so he neglected Bragg's hopes that the Mississippi troops would be able to carry Middle Tennessee. The Army of the West, however, suffered a bloody repulse before Corinth on October 3 and 4 and Van Dorn's entire offensive came to naught.

Even as Van Dorn began his march northwards, Davis acted to again restructure the military situation in Mississippi. Major General John C. Pemberton was recalled from his command in South Carolina and placed in charge of a new department - the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana. Pemberton's assignment to this new department was done to allow Van Dorn to concentrate fully on moving into West Tennessee.¹⁰⁰ In effect this meant Van Dorn was to conquer himself a new department; the problem with this was that he had to do so by moving into West Tennessee, a region still officially assigned to Bragg's Department No. 2. When Van Dorn retreated from Corinth he was left "an isolated body" in the field in Mississippi, "relieved of command of the department he was forced to operate within".¹⁰¹ Further problems existed in that Pemberton was given the objective of trying to recapture New Orleans in co-operation with the troops in the Trans-Mississippi

¹⁰⁰Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 716-718.

¹⁰¹Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, pp. 80-81; Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, p. 727.

Department under Major General Richard Taylor. To try to sort out all these problems, on October 14 Pemberton was promoted to outrank Van Dorn, and his authority was extended to include the latter's army. The offensive against New Orleans was temporarily postponed, as were any plans to aid Bragg.¹⁰²

The last of the forces Bragg and Kirby Smith hoped to add to their Kentucky expedition also proved to be a disappointment. Breckinridge, commanding a small division of 2500 men, only completed his long journey from eastern Louisiana to East Tennessee on October 3. Several days passed before he could begin the march to join the armies in the Bluegrass State. At the last minute Major General Samuel Jones, commanding the Department of East Tennessee in Kirby Smith's absence, requested and received permission from Richmond to take control of most of Breckinridge's soldiers. These men, nominally part of Bragg's command, were to be sent to bolster the Rebels to the south of Nashville in Middle Tennessee. This region was also legally part of Department No. 2, but was currently being administered through the Department of East Tennessee. On October 14 Breckinridge was ordered to go to Middle Tennessee with his entire division and there

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 717, 728.

assume command of the operations in that region.¹⁰³

By mid-October both Bragg and Kirby Smith's armies were in retreat from Kentucky. Only after the Battle of Perryville did the two armies begin to operate in conjunction. Even so, by then Bragg had decided to retreat from Kentucky. Few Kentuckians had rallied to the Southern cause and Federal strength in the state was rapidly increasing. As well, the hoped for reinforcements from Mississippi were not materializing. The creation of the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana had also cut off any logistical support that could be lent to the armies in Kentucky.¹⁰⁴ Finally, as part of the restructuring of the western departments in early October, the War Department transferred the Georgia section of the Department of East Tennessee to the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, thereby precluding the use of this region as a source of supplies just as the combined armies of Bragg and Kirby Smith began to retreat

¹⁰³Edwin C. Bearss, "General Breckinridge Leads the Confederate Advance into Middle Tennessee", Register of Kentucky Historical Society, Vol. LX, No. 3 (1962), pp. 183, 190-193; Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp. 930, 1000; The exact boundary between Department No. 2 and the Department of East Tennessee was not defined until September 12, 1862. It was then set as running along the line of the Hiawassee River. Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴Apart from gaining several cavalry regiments the Confederate recruiting attempts had failed completely. J. Stoddard Johnston, "Kentucky", Evans, Confederate Military History, Vol. IX, pp. 151-153.

from Kentucky into East Tennessee.¹⁰⁵

The failure of the Kentucky campaign can largely be blamed on the problems of the departmental system in the West. The enlargement of Department No. 2 in the summer of 1862 had provided Bragg with a base for the large scale flanking movement that had brought the Union armies to a sudden halt. However, the exclusion of East Tennessee from his jurisdiction had given Bragg a flawed command organization with which to press his advantage. Forced to depend on Kirby Smith's co-operation, Bragg had felt himself too weak to risk an all out battle with Buell for the possession of Kentucky, even when in an advantageous position at Munfordville.

The great size of Department No. 2 had also led to problems. Events in Kentucky held Bragg's attention to the extent that he ignored Mississippi. Van Dorn was forced to communicate directly with the War Department in order to clarify his command situation because Bragg had not been able to give his attention to this problem. And, as Richmond had its own affairs close at hand, it too was unable to provide firm directions. Its solution had been to recreate a regionalized department to try to co-ordinate affairs in Mississippi. It was therefore becoming increasingly apparent that yet again a completely

¹⁰⁵Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, p. 197.

new structure of command would have to be created in the West.

CHAPTER III

A TIME OF LOST OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE WEST

In late October, 1862 the Confederate invasion of Kentucky had run its course. The expedition, which only two months earlier had held such high promise, came to its conclusion as the combined armies of Bragg and Kirby Smith emerged from the mountains of eastern Kentucky and took up a position in the Tennessee Valley. For Bragg's troops, however, a new offensive was in the offing. Orders were issued on the 23rd of October for the Army of the Mississippi to move through Chattanooga into Middle Tennessee. Kirby Smith, back again in his own department, turned down a request by Bragg that he accompany this move.¹

Bragg's army was still just starting its transfer when Richmond, anxious to hear at first hand what had gone wrong in Kentucky, on October 23rd ordered Bragg to come to the capital to meet with the President.² At this conference Bragg advised Davis of the frustrations he had

¹Horn, The Army of Tennessee, p. 189; Official Records, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp. 975-976.

²Ibid., p. 976.

encountered in trying to co-ordinate the various Rebel commands in the West during his offensive in Kentucky. He recommended that to ensure the success of future operations a theatre commander should be appointed.³

Bragg's suggestions reinforced the conclusions that both Davis and Randolph had already reached. Randolph, anxious to make use of the unity of command established in Mississippi by the creation of the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, had been putting out ideas for an offensive into Tennessee by the combined forces of Bragg, Pemberton, and Holmes, the newly assigned commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department. In an explanation of his plans Randolph had emphasized to Holmes the need for close co-ordination between the various armies. Evidently, he had divined some of the difficulties Bragg had faced.⁴ Although Randolph's plans were not immediately acted upon, they are indicative of the direction of the War Department's thinking at this time. During the previous months Richmond had attempted to achieve co-ordination between various departments by shifting departmental boundaries to reflect the changing strategic situation. While this had been partially successful, all too often the time required for Richmond

³Thomas L. Connelly, Autumn of Glory, The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865 (Baton Rouge, 1971), p. 22.

⁴Official Records, Vol. XIII, pp. 889-890; Vandiver, Rebel Brass, pp. 51-52.

to implement a required change had been much too great for the system to operate with complete success. The problems between Bragg and Kirby Smith had been one result. The difficulties Bragg had faced in trying to command both an army and the departmental forces in Mississippi were another. The logical solution was the appointment of a commander that would be present in the West and would have authority over all the forces in the region. Not necessarily in specific command of any of the western armies, this commander would be given the task of coordinating operations between the different departments based upon the information he was able to obtain by his immediate presence in the region.⁵

With both the President and the Secretary of War in agreement over the establishment of a multi-departmental command the question then arose over who would be put in charge. Of the three line officers who outranked Bragg, only General Joseph E. Johnston was available for such an assignment. Lee was currently fully occupied commanding the Army of Northern Virginia and Beauregard had only recently been removed by Davis from the command of the Army of the Mississippi.⁶ Notice was therefore sent to

⁵Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, pp. 83-85.

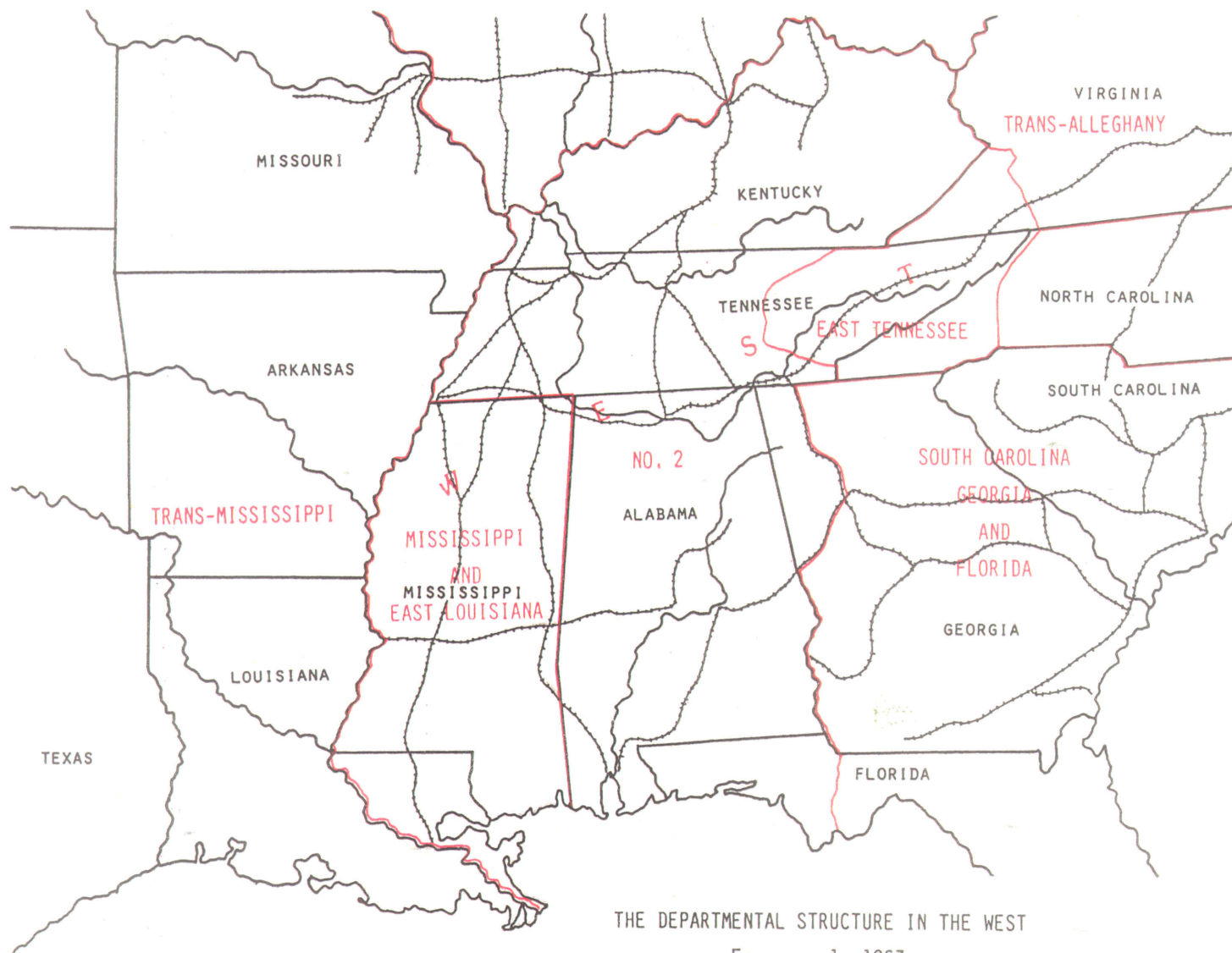
⁶Gilbert E. Govan and James Livingood, A Different Valor: The Story of General Joseph E. Johnston, C.S.A. (Indianapolis, 1956), pp. 161-162.

Johnston advising him that plans were being drawn up to place him in command of all of the region between the Appalachians and the Mississippi.

Eager to participate in the creation of his new command, Johnston conferred with Randolph on the 13th of November. Johnston expressed his concern that as the Federal troops in the Mississippi Valley were concentrated under one commander the Rebel armies defending the Mississippi should also be united.⁷ This would entail drawing the forces under Holmes from the Trans-Mississippi to the east bank of the Mississippi. Johnston believed that such a concentration would allow for the destruction of Grant's army in northern Mississippi and the subsequent transferral of the war to the Ohio River.

In response to these suggestions Randolph revealed an order he had issued two weeks earlier instructing Holmes to move with his troops to the east side of the Mississippi and, if necessary, take command of operations in the region. Randolph then read to Johnston an order from Davis sent out on November 12 countermanding Randolph's message. Davis stated that the transfer "of the commander from the Trans-Mississippi Department for

⁷Johnston was incorrect in his understanding of the Federal command structure in the Mississippi Valley. Grant did not have control over the Union forces in the Trans-Mississippi. He had to rely on the co-operation of the commander of the Department of the Missouri. Edwin C. Bearss, The Campaign For Vicksburg (Dayton, Ohio, 1986), Vol. I, p. 77.



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FEBRUARY 1, 1863

temporary duty elsewhere would have a disastrous effect". Presumably, Davis wanted to avoid the problems that Bragg had encountered commanding an army outside of his department. Significantly, the President had not ruled out the possibility of reinforcements being sent from the Trans-Mississippi to Pemberton, he only put the final authority for the dispatch of these troops firmly under Holmes' jurisdiction.⁸

Davis' undercutting of his Secretary of War's authority lead to Randolph's resignation on November 15. This delayed the issuance of orders assigning Johnston to the command of the new Department of the West until November 24. The orders which were finally given to Johnston put him in charge of a geographical command east of the Mississippi and west of a line "commencing with the Blue Ridge Mountains running through the western portions of North Carolina, and following the line of said mountains through the northern part of Georgia to the railroad south from Chattanooga; thence by that road to West Point, and down the west bank of the Chattahoochee River to the boundary of Alabama and Florida; following that boundary to the Choctawhatchee Bay (including the waters of that Bay) to the Gulf of Mexico".⁹

⁸Joseph E. Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations (1874, rpr. Bloomington, Ind., 1959) pp. 145-149; Official Records, Vol. XIII, pp. 906-907, 914-915.

⁹Ibid., Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 757-758.

In effect this gave Johnston control over three departments: Pemberton's Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, Bragg's Department No. 2, and Kirby Smith's Department of East Tennessee. To Johnston this command had several weaknesses. The greatest problem, as he pointed out immediately upon accepting his post, was the exclusion of any authority over the Trans-Mississippi Department. He repeated his earlier argument that since Arkansas was not currently threatened with invasion the troops there could be better employed in Mississippi, but this suggestion was not found agreeable to Davis' thinking.¹⁰ Bragg's and Kirby Smith's jurisdictions also presented problems, not the least being that the two departments occupied a single geographical region with similar strategic interests. This was then made worse by the continuance of Bragg's authority over the District of the Gulf. This District included southern Alabama and parts of western Georgia and Florida. These regions had little or no strategic connection to Bragg's army, yet were of vital importance to Pemberton at Vicksburg.¹¹

The unity of the command was also threatened by two potential sources of confusion. The orders establishing the Department of the West used the term "geographical

¹⁰Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, pp. 149-150.

¹¹Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, p. 107.

command". To Johnston, well versed in military protocol, such a term could have only one meaning - it excluded his assumption of personal leadership over any of the forces in his department.¹² Secondly, the departmental commanders under Johnston's jurisdiction were allowed to ignore the proper chain of command and report directly to the War Department. Davis claimed that this was done to avoid unnecessary delays in communication, but the potential for disaster was already established.¹³

Filled with misgivings over the nature of his new assignment Johnston departed for the West. In spite of the earlier rebuff from Richmond, however, he remained convinced of the efficacy of his original solution to western problems: the concentration of the forces in Mississippi and Arkansas against Grant. On December 4 Johnston's hopes that his views were yet to receive support were raised when he received a telegram from the Adjutant-General advising him that Pemberton was being forced to back into central Mississippi and "Lieutenant General Holmes has been peremptorily ordered to reinforce him". The telegram continued on to urge Johnston to send troops from the Army of Tennessee as Holmes might not be

¹²Donald Sanger, "Some Problems Facing Joseph E. Johnston in the Spring of 1863", Avery Craven (ed.), Essays in Honor of William Dodd (Chicago, 1935), pp. 262-263.

¹³Official Records, Vol. LII, Part 2, pp. 496-497; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 37.

able to arrive in Mississippi in time to be of any aid to Pemberton.¹⁴ Johnston replied to this message by repeating his opinion that the reinforcement of the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana by Holmes was the only proper strategic course to follow, to weaken Bragg's Army of Tennessee at this time was to court disaster.¹⁵

Johnston's hopes for reinforcing the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana from the Trans-Mississippi were to be dashed during the following week. Davis, anxious to review the situation in the West first hand, paid a visit to the various forces between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. Davis was especially concerned over Pemberton's retreat into central Mississippi in front of Grant's advancing Northerners.¹⁶ On December 10 Davis arrived in Chattanooga and the following day he and Johnston visited Bragg's headquarters in Murfreesboro. Upon conferring with Bragg and the commander of the Department of the West, Davis made the

¹⁴The Army of the Mississippi was redesignated the Army of Tennessee on November 20, 1862. Amann, (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, p. 198; Joseph E. Johnston, "Jefferson Davis and the Mississippi Campaign", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. III, pp. 473-474; Official Records, Vol. XX, Part 2, p. 435.

¹⁵Ibid., Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 780-781.

¹⁶Govan and Livingood, A Different Valor, p. 168; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 39.

decision to reinforce Pemberton with troops drawn from Tennessee. Overriding the objections from both Bragg and Johnston, and suggesting to Bragg that he should abandon Tennessee if pressed by the Federals, Davis ordered the three brigades of Stevenson's Division to be sent to Mississippi along with a brigade from East Tennessee.¹⁷ These troops followed the men of Vaughn's Brigade, which had been transferred from East Tennessee to Mobile and then to Mississippi in late November and early December.¹⁸ At the same time it was revealed to Johnston that Holmes had not been ordered to go to aid Vicksburg, the Adjutant-General's earlier order notwithstanding, but in fact had only been given permission to send troops if Holmes felt he was able to spare the men.¹⁹

Johnston then accompanied Davis on his visit to Pemberton's department. Once again Johnston argued for a transfer of troops from Holmes to Mississippi. Davis again was only willing to suggest to Holmes that he send aid if practical.²⁰ In the absence of any direct orders,

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 40-41; Official Records, Vol. XX, Part 2, pp. 450, 453, 462.

¹⁸Bearss, The Campaign For Vicksburg, Vol. I, p. 143.

¹⁹Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, p. 118.

²⁰Johnston, "Jefferson Davis and the Mississippi Campaign", p. 474; Jack B. Scroggs and Donald E. Reynolds, "Arkansas and the Vicksburg Campaign", Civil War History, Vol. V, No. 4 (1959), p. 392.

however, Holmes declined to act.²¹

For Johnston the first weeks of his new command had been very trying. His attempts to effect a concentration of the forces in the Mississippi Valley had fallen far short of his hopes. Instead, the Tennessee front had been weakened by the removal of the five brigades which had been sent to Mississippi. The underlying problem lay in a difference of opinion between Johnston and the President over the proper strategy in the West. Johnston felt that both Tennessee and Mississippi were vital to the Confederate war effort, and that although both were threatened by Federal forces to weaken Tennessee to help Pemberton would only lead to disaster. The loss of Tennessee would give the Federals vast new strategic opportunities. In his view, the troops in the Trans-Mississippi were a much better source of reinforcements for Pemberton since no Federal troops were threatening Arkansas. Davis, on the other hand, did not think that the Union forces could threaten both Middle Tennessee and the line of the Mississippi River at the same time. Furthermore, he did not view Tennessee as being of much

²¹Some troops from Holmes' command did eventually reach the Department of the West when the Post of Arkansas on the Arkansas River fell to General McClernand's Federal army on January 11, 1863. The Confederate prisoners, upon their exchange, were formed into a brigade which was assigned to the Army of Tennessee. Harrel, "Arkansas", pp. 353, 396; O. M. Roberts, "Texas", Evans (ed.), Confederate Military History, Vol. XI, p. 63.

importance; hence his advice to Bragg that the abandonment of Middle Tennessee was an acceptable loss. For Davis the prime Confederate strategic objective was to retain control of the Mississippi River. As long as the South was able to deny the Federals control over that vital waterway the Confederacy was able to demonstrate to everyone the futility of trying to crush Southern aspirations for independence. Control of the Mississippi River also was an important factor in encouraging dissention in the North. The Northwestern states, historically dependent on the river for the export of their agricultural products, were sure to express their dissatisfaction with any Federal administration that appeared to be unable to successfully prosecute the war in this region.²² The Trans-Mississippi also was a primary source of sugar and molasses. These products were important to the government, not necessarily as articles of consumption themselves, but instead were of vital use as a commodity which could be exchanged in the East for meat supplies held by the civilian population.²³

Events in the waning days of December and of early

²²Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksurg, pp. 127-128; Thomas L. Connelly, "Vicksburg: Strategic Point or Propaganda Device?", Military Affairs, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1 (1970), pp. 52-53.

²³Michael F. Wright, "Vicksburg and the Trans-Mississippi Supply Line (1861-1863)", The Journal of Mississippi History, Vol. XLIII, No. 3 (1981), pp. 211-212.

January partially vindicated Johnston's views. In the Battle of Murfreesboro, the Army of Tennessee assaulted the lines of Rosecrans' numerically stronger advancing army and was bloodily repulsed. On January 3, 1863 Bragg retreated thirty-six miles to the south and entrenched his battered army around Tullahoma, Tennessee. In Mississippi the Confederates were more fortunate. An attempt to take Vicksburg was beaten back, aided in part by the advance units of Stevenson's Division, and by the use of cavalry raids on Grant's supply lines the Federal march into central Mississippi was literally derailed. Nevertheless, both affairs had demonstrated that Tennessee and Mississippi would be in grave danger if one was weakened to support the other in the face of simultaneous Federal advances.

In the first few months of 1863 Johnston began to try to establish a proper defensive structure for the Department of the West. The first step was the creation of a cavalry reserve to be used as a strategic link between the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana and the Army of Tennessee encamped to the south of Murfreesboro. This force, established under Van Dorn, who was transferred from Mississippi along with four cavalry brigades, was headquartered in Columbia, Tennessee. Additional cavalry reinforcements were obtained from East Tennessee and from Mobile. This cavalry was so positioned

as to be able to threaten Grant's lines of communication in West Tennessee, or alternatively, protect Bragg's left flank from any movement by Rosecrans' army in the Nashville-Murfreesboro region. The possession of Columbia also gave the Confederates control of the logistically important Duck River Valley.²⁴

Provisions were also made to strengthen the Confederate position in East Tennessee. Believing that Bragg would not always be able to aid the Department of East Tennessee with infantry reinforcements, Johnston sought to establish a cavalry force similar to that created to protect Pemberton's department. To this end it was planned that Morgan's cavalry from Bragg's army would be used to attack the rear of any Northern force moving into East Tennessee.²⁵

The creation of these cavalry reserves was conceived and implemented without any consultation with Pemberton or Bragg. Thus Johnston's action can be seen as an important step in his attempts to come to grips with the nature of his command. Whereas at first Johnston had seen himself as limited to a primarily consultative role, he now had become willing to intervene in the local affairs of his

²⁴Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, p. 522; Archer Jones, "Tennessee and Mississippi, Joe Johnston's Strategic Problem", Tennessee Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (1959), pp. 136-137.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 142-143.

subordinate departments and order the transfer of at least some of their troops outside of their original jurisdiction.²⁶

In addition, Johnston moved to establish a system whereby troop transfers within the Department of the West could be more efficiently implemented. His concern first centered on the small Department of East Tennessee. As a step towards strengthening this area its boundaries were extended to include the westernmost six counties of Virginia. This brought General Humphrey Marshall's small force under the control of this department.²⁷ Determined to make the most of the troops within the department, Johnston then ordered a concentration of "a strong reserve" of all "infantry not employed in guarding bridges or keeping the disloyal in subjection".²⁸ By early April the troops so assembled were at two or three points near the railroad ready for a prompt move within their own department or into Middle Tennessee.²⁹ Not content to stop at this, it was planned that the troops in the neighbouring Department of Western Virginia would assist

²⁶Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, p. 136; Hartje, Van Dorn, pp. 272-273; Official Records, Vol. XVII, Part 2, pp. 832-833.

²⁷Ibid., Vol. XX, Part 2, p. 499.

²⁸Ibid., Vol. XXIII, Part. 2, p. 727.

²⁹Jones, "Tennessee and Mississippi, Joe Johnston's Strategic Problem", pp. 141-142.

the East Tennesseans if they were threatened.³⁰

At the same time a structure to allow the transfer of men from Mississippi to Tennessee was conceived. This system never was as well developed as were the plans for East Tennessee. It involved the prepositioning of reserves in Jackson and Meridian, Mississippi. These troops were thus already along the railroad to Tennessee while still remaining within easy reach of Vicksburg. This plan was also extended to include the infantry in Mobile; should reinforcement of the Army of Tennessee become necessary, the Mobile forces could start immediately for Tennessee and in turn would be replaced by the last units to leave Mississippi. It was hoped that in this way some of the long transfer time between the two fronts could be reduced.³¹

In spite of these attempts to reorganize his department, Johnston faced a number of severe problems. Since the creation of the Department of the West Johnston had held serious misgivings about the strategic parameters of his command. The misalignment of the Mississippi River front, cut off from reinforcements from the Trans-Mississippi, has already been detailed. Johnston,

³⁰Ibid., Fabian V. Husley, "The Department of Western Virginia: Guardian of the Alleghenies", West Virginia History, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3 (1972), pp. 268-269.

³¹Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, p. 597; Vol. XXIII, Part 2, p. 750.

however, was also convinced that his position in the West was being used as a way to keep him from holding any important command. He felt that his orders were vague and his authority undefined. He could not have been encouraged by the fact that the portion of the Department of the West to the west of the line of the railroad running from Chattanooga via Atlanta to West Point, Alabama was originally part of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. This anomaly was corrected only when this area was incorporated into Bragg's department on January 30, 1863.³² Davis' interference in transferring troops from Bragg to Pemberton, in spite of Johnston's advice to the contrary, also undermined the assurances Johnston had been given that he alone was in charge of the Department of the West.³³

Another problem seemed to be one of personality. Johnston found himself in a role for which he was ill suited. He did not seem to be able to understand the concept of a theatre command, admittedly a concept that for him was without precedent. Johnston felt that any position that did not entail the direct command of an army in the field was essentially meaningless. Furthermore,

³²Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, pp. 189, 204.

³³Vandiver, Rebel Brass, pp. 58-59.

although his orders gave him permission to assume control of any army in his department should events warrant such a move, he believed that any such an action on his part would be misinterpreted as being motivated only by ambition".³⁴

Johnston's feelings of uncertainty were compounded by the fact that all three departmental commanders under his supervision were allowed to communicate directly with Richmond. Although Davis tried to impress upon Johnston that he had full authority within the Department of the West, Johnston was increasingly uninformed about what was going on within his jurisdiction. Pemberton was the worst offender in bypassing Johnston. Assuming that Johnston was concerned primarily with events in Tennessee, by the spring of 1863 Pemberton was only sending information to Johnston that pertained to the defense of Tennessee. The result was that he gained a de facto independence from the Department of the West.³⁵

All of these problems came to a head in April and May

³⁴Frank E. Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Unified Army Command", Louisiana Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1 (1955), pp. 31-32.

³⁵Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, pp. 108-109, 175-176; Sanger, "Some Problems Facing Joseph E. Johnston in the Spring of 1863", p. 266; Thomas R. Hay, "Confederate Leadership at Vicksburg", Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. XI, No. 4 (1925), p. 554.

of 1863. A report in early April warned that indications were that Grant was in the process of moving north to support Rosecrans in Tennessee.³⁶ Pemberton began to collect troops to reinforce Bragg and about 8000 men began the journey to Tennessee. Buckner's command in Mobile also sent several regiments north. Only East Tennessee, threatened by the fear of a Federal advance from Kentucky, did not contribute reinforcements. Apart from this, the system for reinforcing Bragg worked smoothly and efficiently.³⁷

But the reported movement of Grant's army proved to be a false alarm. On April 17, Grant made a successful attempt to send river transports down the Mississippi past Vicksburg. Reports of reinforcements for Grant were also received by Pemberton and duly reported to Richmond. Pemberton then began to request that the troops already sent to Tennessee should be returned.³⁸

It was evident by the end of April that it was Pemberton's department, and not the Army of Tennessee, that was in the greatest danger. Reinforcements for

³⁶Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, p. 712; Vol. XXIII, Part 2, p. 752.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 734, 738; Jones, "Tennessee and Mississippi, Joe Johnston's Strategic Problem", pp. 146-147; Archer Jones, "The Vicksburg Campaign", The Journal of Mississippi History, Vol. XXIX, No. 1 (1967), pp. 13-14.

³⁸Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, pp. 751-753.

Pemberton, however, were not as quickly dispatched as they might have been. The system to provide reinforcements for Bragg proved to be poorly established to rush aid to Mississippi. Pemberton also added to the delay by focusing his attention on a series of Federal cavalry raids. The bulk of his correspondence with Richmond and the Department of the West's headquarters were pleas for cavalry to oppose these raiders.³⁹ Johnston only learned on the 28th of April that Grant's army was below Vicksburg on the west bank of the Mississippi and was expected to cross to the Mississippi side very shortly. All Johnston could do was to instruct Pemberton to concentrate his forces and defeat Grant.⁴⁰ Johnston's plans for utilizing a cavalry force to oppose Grant in Mississippi also were stymied. Because Johnston had felt that to weaken Bragg was to invite disaster he had placed all of his faith in this corps. Grant now successfully neutralized these troops by restricting his line of communication to the Mississippi River and by launching a series of raids into West Tennessee and Northern Mississippi.⁴¹

³⁹Bearss, The Campaign For Vicksburg, Vol. II, pp. 203, 211; John C. Pemberton III, Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1942), pp. 102-104; Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, pp. 769, 778, 791.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 797, 808.

⁴¹Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg, pp. 194-195.

Pemberton's disposition to not confide fully in Johnston concerning affairs in the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana now returned with a vengeance. Apart from a request for reinforcements sent on the 1st of May Pemberton's communications with Johnston contained no information about his increasingly desperate situation. Johnston was left completely in the dark until on May 9 when he was ordered by the War Department to proceed to Mississippi and take command of the forces there.⁴²

The bulk of Pemberton's communications had been with Davis and the War Department in Richmond. He kept the capital steadily updated on the situation south of Vicksburg while constantly calling for reinforcements.⁴³ Davis in turn neglected to advise Johnston of what was going on in Mississippi. Instead, he began to take matters into his own hands, first ordering Beauregard to send reinforcements to Vicksburg from his Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida; and then sending Johnston to take personal command of the situation in Mississippi.⁴⁴

Thus in the course of a few weeks the entire facade of the Department of the West collapsed. For this blame

⁴²Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, pp. 170-172.

⁴³Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, pp. 808, 814.

⁴⁴Ibid., Vol. XIV, pp. 923, 925-926.

must be shared between several individuals. Johnston had not ever been fully committed to making his position work. He had always been unsure of the limits of his jurisdiction and therefore had been reluctant to place himself in a position where he could be accused of trying to exceed his authority. Furthermore, his attempts to deal with this problem were hampered by the nature of his communications; they tended to arouse resentment in the War Department. One official wrote in March 1863, "Johnston has written another of his brief, unsatisfactory, almost captious letters . . . He never treats the Government with confidence, hardly with respect".⁴⁵

Another problem could be found in Johnston's paramount concern over the situation in Tennessee. Convinced that the Army of Tennessee would not be able to sustain its position at Tullahoma if it detached troops to aid Pemberton, Johnston had not made any provisions to send help to Mississippi. Instead he had relied solely on building up a cavalry force which could be used against Grant. Perhaps this strategy might have been successful, but it did not work due to the lack of co-operation by Pemberton. Pemberton's refusal to keep in touch with

⁴⁵Edward Younger (ed.), Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Kean, Head of the Bureau of War (Westport, Conn., 1973), p. 46.

Johnston meant that when the crisis came Johnston could not react as promptly as was necessary. At no time was this more critical than in the first week of May. Finally Davis must be held responsible for not sustaining Johnston. He did not help Johnston by undermining his authority several times when he unilaterally transferred troops within the Department of the West. Because Davis felt only one Federal offensive in the West could be mounted at one time, he viewed Johnston's query as to whether Tennessee or Mississippi was more important as pointless. Davis was convinced that with proper management by Johnston, and by balancing the necessities of each area, both Mississippi and Tennessee could be held.⁴⁶ Davis also allowed the practice of departmental commanders within the Department of the West to communicate directly with Richmond to continue. This led to Pemberton's effective succession from Johnston's control.

Johnston's transfer to Mississippi opened a new phase in the history of the departmental system. That this transfer caused endless confusion about the exact structure of the departmental system in the West was perhaps indicative of the return to an earlier command format in the region.

⁴⁶Jones, "The Vicksburg Campaign", p. 26.

3.2 A RETURN TO IMPROVISATION

Johnston's arrival in Jackson was not at all auspicious. He detrained just as the first reinforcements for Pemberton from the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida were finally pulling in to the station after a grueling seven day journey. Here he was met by Brigadier General Gregg, commander of an infantry brigade transferred to central Mississippi from Port Hudson in southern Mississippi several days before. Gregg informed Johnston that Grant's army lay between him and Pemberton. Johnston realized that the only chance for Confederate success against the Northern forces was in the concentration of all the Rebel forces in Mississippi. Accordingly, he ordered Pemberton to join him north of Jackson. Pemberton, unsure of himself, failed to do this and was invested in Vicksburg on the 19th of May.⁴⁷

Johnston was now faced with creating an army to try to lift the siege of Vicksburg. His first need was for more manpower. The nearest source of troops was to the south at Port Hudson where Major General Franklin Gardner was posted. Johnston ordered Gardner to join him immediately. However, Gardner delayed and by the 23rd of May found himself under siege by Bank's army based in New

⁴⁷Horn, The Army of Tennessee, pp. 214-215.

Orleans.⁴⁸ The order from Richmond which had sent Johnston to Mississippi also provided for the transfer of 3000 men from Bragg's army to the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana. The two brigades detailed to fulfill these orders arrived in Mississippi on May 17. On the 18th Bragg ordered a cavalry division of two brigades to follow the infantry already dispatched, it arrived in central Mississippi on the 3rd of the next month. Five days later an additional brigade from the Atlantic seaboard arrived. The next day Davis ordered Bragg to send an additional division south. These reinforcements, along with additional troops concentrated from within the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, brought Johnston's strength to more than 30000 men. At this point the combined forces of Johnston and Pemberton outnumbered Grant's besieging army.⁴⁹

Yet Johnston delayed taking the offensive. His army was handicapped by a shortage of transportation and supplies and needed to properly organize the disparate units arriving from all over the lower South. Far from considering his army ready to assume the attack, Johnston

⁴⁸Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, p. 869; Bearss, The Campaign For Vicksburg, Vol. III, p. 969.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 970-971, 976-978; Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, pp. 889, 978, 1009-1010; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 97.

instead requested further reinforcements. Seddon held out no hope. He bluntly informed Johnston that he would have to rely on what troops he already had.⁵⁰

Attempts to reactivate Johnston's earlier plans of aiding the situation in Mississippi from the Trans-Mississippi Department also fell far short of what was necessary. Holmes, who had been a poor administrator at best, had finally been superceded in command of the Trans-Mississippi Department in March of 1863. His replacement, Kirby Smith, had immediately begun a total reorganization of his new command. This, however, took up valuable time, and when the demands for the Trans-Mississippi to assist Vicksburg began to arrive at Kirby Smith's headquarters Kirby Smith was sure he "had to do something" but did not know what.⁵¹ When he finally did act, instead of concentrating his troops for a decisive thrust at one objective, Kirby Smith rather frittered his strength away in three separate maneuvers. Walker's Division, after a long delay, made a half-hearted assault on Young's Point and Milliken's Bend, both Union supply depots on the Mississippi River. Neither attack accomplished anything to help out the Rebels besieged in Vicksburg.⁵² A second

⁵⁰Horn, The Army of Tennessee, p. 217.

⁵¹Richard Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction (1879, rpr. New York, 1955), pp. 162-166, Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 3, p. 846.

⁵²Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana, pp. 198-202.

advance against the Federals in the Lafourche country of southern Louisiana by General Richard Taylor bore a similar lack of results. Finally, Holmes, now relegated to the command of the District of Arkansas, belatedly moved to attack Helena, Arkansas. His unsuccessful assault on the Mississippi River town took place on July 4, 1863.⁵³

Not only the Trans-Mississippi lacked cohesion in its strategy. The need for reorganization within Johnston's Army of Relief, which was restructured at least three times in as many weeks, was a reflection of the disorganization that existed over the command of the Department of the West. Almost a month after leaving Tullahoma, Johnston was sent a message from Seddon suggesting that more reinforcements from Bragg be ordered to Mississippi by Johnston. Johnston replied that he did not consider himself to have any authority in Tennessee since being sent to Mississippi, and therefore did not feel that he could order Bragg to do any such action. A reply was immediately sent by Davis that censured Johnston for thinking that, although he had been sent to Mississippi, his assignment as commander of the Department of the West had been precluded. Johnston pointedly telegraphed back that the repeated troop transfers ordered

⁵³Robert L. Kerby, Kirby Smith's Confederacy, The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-1865 (New York, 1972), pp. 112-113, 121.

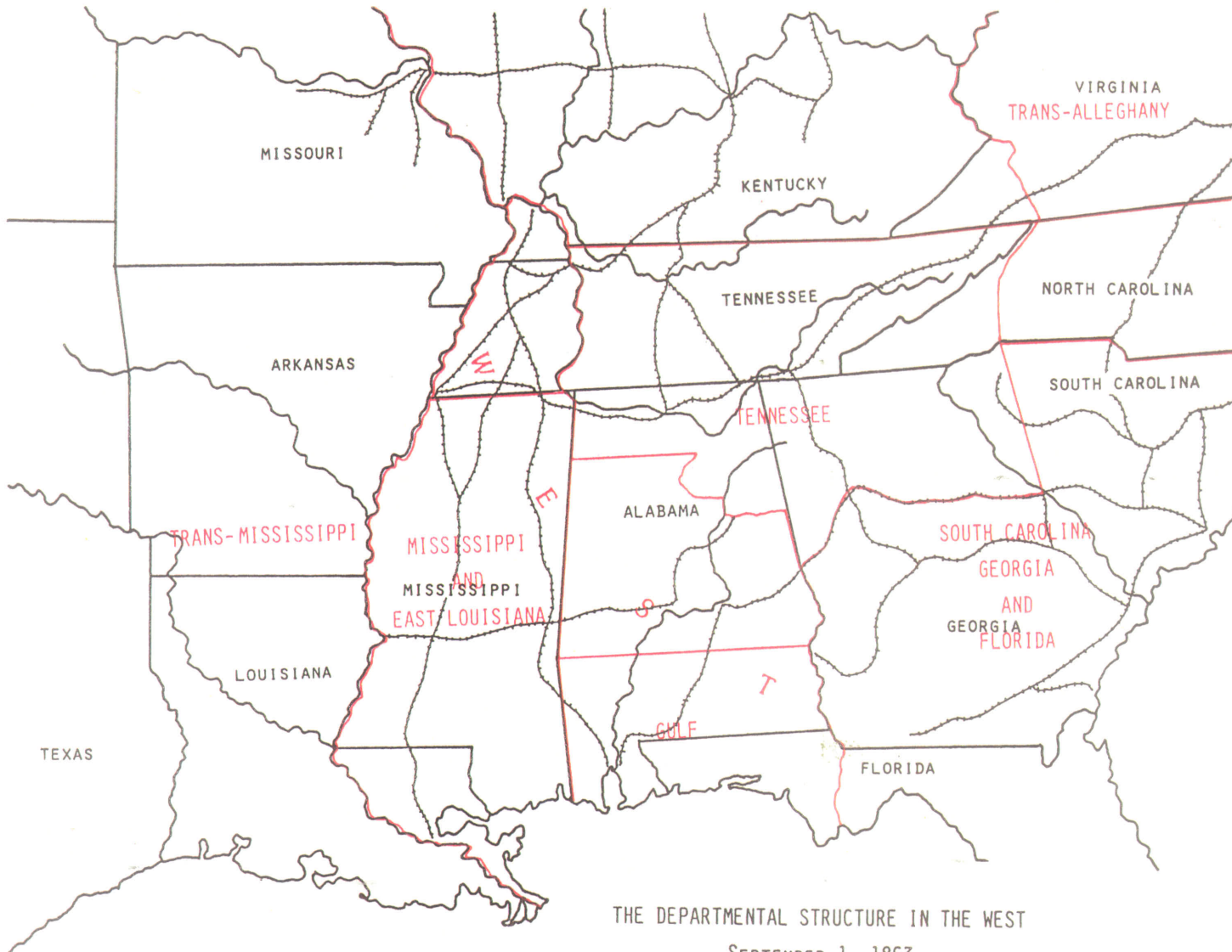
by Davis had convinced him that he had indeed been restricted in his command to only the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana.⁵⁴

Johnston also drew attention to another infringement by Richmond upon the integrity of the Department of the West. On June 8 the War Department had established the Department of the Gulf, a command encompassing Mobile and the approaches to it, as a separate department within Johnston's Department of the West. This action was taken at the suggestion of the former commander at Mobile, Simon Bolivar Buckner. Nevertheless, because Johnston was not consulted on this decision, it cannot have been viewed as a vote of confidence on the part of Johnston.⁵⁵

Actions by the Federals in Middle Tennessee and Mississippi now began to overwhelm the Confederates. On the 26th of June Rosecrans began a movement against Bragg's flanks that forced him to retreat to the south of the Tennessee River. Badly outnumbered and outmaneuvered, Bragg took up a defensive position in Chattanooga on the 4th of July. On the same day Vicksburg fell to its Northern besiegers. These twin disasters galvanized Richmond to completely redesign the departmental structure

⁵⁴Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 97-98; Govan and Livingood, A Different Valor, p. 211; Official Records, Vol. XXIV, Part 1, p. 226; Vol. XXIV, Part 3, pp. 97-971.

⁵⁵Ibid., Vol. XXIII, Part 2, pp. 833-834; Vol. XXVI, Part 2, p. 40.



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in the West. By this time Davis had completely lost all confidence in Johnston's strategic capabilities. Johnston had proven unwilling to act to save Vicksburg; Davis blamed this inactivity for the loss of Pemberton's army.⁵⁶

Johnston was relieved of his jurisdiction over Bragg's Department No. 2 and the Department of East Tennessee on July 22nd. Three days later Department No. 2 was redesignated as the Department of Tennessee. This new department absorbed the Department of East Tennessee but only included Alabama north of and Tennessee east of the Tennessee River and that part of Georgia west of a line from the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina south to the Georgia Railroad and thence from there along the railroad via Atlanta to West Point on the Alabama-Georgia border. On August 12 the demarcation between the two departments was adjusted to give Bragg jurisdiction over a section of Alabama north of a line running along the southern borders of Calhoun, St. Clair, Blount, Morgan, Lawrence, and Franklin counties.⁵⁷

This left Johnston in control over Pemberton's former Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana as well as

⁵⁶Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, Vol. II, pp. 422-424; Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, p. 211.

⁵⁷Ibid.; Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, pp. 189, 199, 204; Official Records, Vol. XXIII, Part 2, pp. 931, 964.

West Tennessee and much of Alabama. Yet the command structure over which Johnston presided remained tangled and confused. In the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana Johnston was designated as being in charge of the "forces in the field". The post of departmental commander was left vacant; Johnston, however, exercised this role in his continuing capacity as commander of the Department of the West, which retained jurisdiction over the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana. Johnston also directed the Rebel forces in Alabama as the commander of the Department of the West, under which both the Alabama remnant of the now defunct Department No. 2 and the Department of the Gulf remained.⁵⁸

Johnston was now faced with the need to reconstruct his command. Of primary concern was the need to protect the vital remaining rail lines in Mississippi from Union raids. Mississippi still was an important source of agricultural resources, but these were only of military value if they could be transported to where they were needed. Johnston also had to defend the industrial centres of Selma and Montgomery in Alabama. The loss of these munitions producing areas would be a disaster of immense proportions for the Confederate war effort. Johnston felt that these tasks could be largely handled by

⁵⁸Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, pp. 187, 204.

cavalry. He therefore declared himself willing to transfer almost all of his infantry out of his department, retaining only what he felt was necessary to man the fortifications of Mobile should a Federal threat arise against this city.⁵⁹

Bragg, waiting with his army in Chattanooga for the next Union advance, was not as optimistic as Johnston. His newly independent command had been given jurisdiction over a rapidly shrinking area. Virtually all of Middle Tennessee was in Union hands. The agriculturally important Tennessee River Valley was now on the front line, and should Chattanooga fall it would be effectively cut off. The Department of Tennessee was left with a logistical base consisting only of part of northwestern Georgia, northeastern Alabama, and East Tennessee. For Bragg the area guarded by the forces in Johnston's department was of vital importance.⁶⁰

At this time it was becoming clear to many western officers that a concentration of the forces in the West was necessary. Polk, commanding a corps in the Army of Tennessee, wrote Davis on July 26 urging him to accept the proposal that Johnston's and Bragg's armies be combined to

⁵⁹Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, pp. 253-254; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 147.

⁶⁰Ibid.

stop Rosecrans.⁶¹ Two weeks previously Bragg had written to Johnston about the feasibility of such a concentration, although he suggested that this action take place in Mississippi.⁶² The War Department gradually began to take notice of these plans, and in the first week of August Seddon asked Bragg if, should he be reinforced by Johnston, he would be able to take the offensive against Rosecrans. At the same time Richmond inquired as to what forces could be sent to Tennessee by Johnston's department.⁶³ Yet here the talk of concentration stalled. Johnston became increasingly embroiled in a letter writing controversy with Davis over their respective roles in the defeat at Vicksburg and, apart from agreeing to send Bragg all his infantry less two brigades, he did not pursue the matter. Bragg too lost interest when he found out that Johnston had only about 18000 effective infantry on hand. Even when reinforced by Buckner's troops still in East Tennessee, Bragg could only muster 40000 men. This was still far too few to be able to move successfully against Rosecrans.⁶⁴

⁶¹Official Records, Vol. XXIII, Part 2, p. 932.

⁶²Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 131-132.

⁶³Official Records, Vol. XXIII, Part 2, p. 936; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 147-148.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 148.

Only when the Federals shelled Chattanooga on the 21st of August did reinforcements for Bragg become a matter of paramount concern. That same day, Bragg, desperate for aid, telegraphed Johnston for assistance. Johnston, wary after his bouts with Davis, in turn asked the War Department if he was authorized to send any aid from his department. Richmond gave its approval and on the 22nd Johnston announced that he was dispatching two divisions to the Department of Tennessee.⁶⁵ The infantry reinforcements sent by Johnston, however, were far short of what he had earlier promised. The two divisions totalled only 9000 infantry, Johnston retained 11700 infantry under his command, including several brigades defending Mobile.⁶⁶ Furthermore, he specified that these reinforcements were a loan and should be returned promptly when Bragg was finished with them. This was said in spite of the fact that one of the two divisions, Breckinridge's, originally came from the Army of Tennessee.⁶⁷

The same week Bragg called for reinforcements from East Tennessee. Here Buckner faced the threat of a Northern invasion force from eastern Kentucky; he realized that he would not be able to remain in position in front

⁶⁵Official Records, Vol. XXX, Part 4, pp. 529-530, 538.

⁶⁶Ibid., Vol. XXVI, Part 2, pp. 163, 164, 190; Vol. XXX, Part 4, pp. 572-573.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 540-541.

of Knoxville. Even so, his movement towards Bragg's army was made in the same half-hearted way as was Johnston's. Buckner only withdrew south as far as Loudon on the Tennessee River.⁶⁸ This reluctance to join up with the Army of Tennessee can probably be blamed on the confusion created by the War Department when it merged the Department of East Tennessee and Department No. 2 to form the Department of Tennessee. The Adjutant-General's order of July 25 announcing the change stated that Buckner should continue to report directly to Richmond.⁶⁹ On August 6, when Bragg had officially taken charge of East Tennessee, Richmond stated that the administration of the former Department of East Tennessee was to remain a part of Buckner's duties. The result was that Buckner appeared torn between his responsibilities to defend East Tennessee and the same time aid Bragg. Only when Knoxville was captured on the 2nd of September and Bragg abandoned Chattanooga did Buckner retreat from the Tennessee Valley to join Bragg's main column in northern Georgia.⁷⁰

Realization of the seriousness of the situation in the Department of Tennessee finally prompted Davis to consider for the first time the possibilities of reinforcing the West from the Army of Northern Virginia.

⁶⁸Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 149.

⁶⁹Official Records, Vol. XXIII, Part 2, p. 931.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 954; Horn, The Army of Tennessee, pp. 241-242.

This idea had been raised before by General Longstreet, one of Lee's corps commanders. In the spring of 1863 he had suggested that his corps be dispatched to unite with Bragg's army in order to strike against Rosecrans and force Grant to withdraw from Vicksburg. His plans had been vetoed and instead Lee pushed north into Pennsylvania, eventually meeting defeat at Gettysburg. Now Longstreet again urged that he be sent west.⁷¹ Davis finally made his decision on about September 5. On the 6th of that month orders were issued for Longstreet to take two divisions of his corps and move at once to reinforce Bragg.⁷²

At the same time the Department of Western Virginia was given command of the northern section of the former Department of East Tennessee. This region had been isolated from the rest of Bragg's and Buckner's commands by the Federal occupation of Knoxville. It was hoped that General Samuel Jones, commander of the Department of Western Virginia, would be able to move against Burnside's

⁷¹Archer Jones, "The Gettysburg Decision", Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. LXVIII, No. 3 (1960), pp. 336 338.

⁷²No record exists of exactly when Davis made up his mind to order Longstreet's move. Lee met with Davis in Richmond during the first week of September and on the 6th issued his orders to Longstreet. Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 151; Official Records, Vol. XXIX, Part 2, pp. 700-701.

Union army in East Tennessee.⁷³

The reinforcements so desperately needed by Bragg gradually arrived and built up his strength. The first to appear, on August 28, were the two divisions from Mississippi. Next to show up, in the second week of September, was Buckner's force. In reply to yet another appeal by Bragg, on September 7 an additional two brigades of infantry began the journey from Mississippi and arrived several days later. Longstreet's advance guard, however, only reached Bragg on the 20th of September, in time to just participate in the last day's action of the Battle of Chickamauga.⁷⁴

The Confederate victory at Chickamauga seemed, at first glance, to have vindicated the departmental system. Troops from throughout the South had been successfully concentrated into a large army that had been able to decisively defeat an advancing Federal force. Yet at the same time several problems still remained. Perhaps the greatest problem was the way in which departmental changes only took place in response to a crisis. The system still lacked strong central co-ordination. In Mississippi, Johnston had vacillated over reinforcing Bragg, finally releasing his troops to go to Tennessee in a piecemeal

⁷³Ibid., Vol. XXX, Part 4, pp. 616-618.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 619; Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, p. 255.

fashion. While originally advocating concentration he proved to be all too susceptible to the proprietary instinct of a departmental commander. Indeed, almost immediately after the Rebel victory at Chickamauga, two of the brigades he had dispatched to Bragg were returned to Johnston's command.⁷⁵ Buckner's slowness in reinforcing Bragg also illustrated the lack of central control. Although the War Department had integrated the Department of East Tennessee into Bragg's command, it then eroded this unity by confusing the issue of Buckner's responsibilities. The changing of departmental boundaries and responsibilities only when military needs demanded immediate action also meant that longer term problems often went unsolved. The retreat of Bragg into northern Georgia cut the Army of Tennessee off from much of its department. The Georgia section of Bragg's jurisdiction was small and of little value as a source of sustenance. As the Army of Tennessee grew in size it became increasingly dependant on Johnston's neighbouring department for its logistical support.

Finally, Davis' unwillingness to send Longstreet to Georgia without first obtaining Lee's consent caused this move to be delayed for a dangerously long period of time. When this decision finally was made the shortest route to Chattanooga was already gone; the capture of Knoxville had

⁷⁵Official Records, Vol. XXX, Part 4, pp. 689, 733.

cut the vital rail line between East Tennessee and Virginia. Longstreet's Corps had to take a roundabout journey through North and South Carolina and Georgia. All these delays stemmed from one basic problem - the structure of the departmental system left final decisions of interdepartmental troop movements up to the departmental commander. As long as Davis persisted in only requesting departmental commanders to co-operate, instead of directly ordering commanders to send reinforcements where they were needed, only when a major crisis was well underway would a departmental commander feel impelled to allow the removal of any of his men. Yet Davis appeared to have learned a lesson from the Vicksburg campaign. He had involved himself in the matter of reinforcing Bragg to an unprecedented degree by urging the concentration of troops from several departments. Ironically, his actions in the West could perhaps be said to have done exactly what Johnston should have been doing as commander of the defunct Department of the West.

The victory gained at Chickamauga was to prove itself hollow within two months. The period following the battle was largely one of Confederate paralysis. Little was done to try to restructure the western command system to be able to take advantage of the victory of late September. This can primarily be blamed on the actions of Bragg. He was determined to root out and destroy the cabal of

officers within his army that had lost all confidence in his ability to command. In so doing he transferred or relieved most of his corps commanders. At the same time he totally reorganized his army in order to disperse his remaining enemies among the various divisions. As a result the army remained besieging Chattanooga and neglected to take any real advantage of the situation presented by September's victory.⁷⁶

In spite of Federal movements to reinforce the Union army in Chattanooga, the Confederates did little to counter these moves. A council between Bragg and Davis, called initially to try to establish a measure of calm between Bragg and his generals, resolved little in the way of strategy apart from an agreement that Bragg would remain on the defensive until strong enough to advance.⁷⁷ The strength of his army was increased in mid to late October by the arrival of five brigades of exchanged troops captured earlier in the year at Vicksburg, but Bragg still did not choose to take the offensive.⁷⁸ Johnston too was reinforced by returning Vicksburg prisoners, but he was not willing to do much but husband

⁷⁶The most comprehensive examination of Bragg's war with his generals is in Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 235-278.

⁷⁷Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, p. 141.

⁷⁸Official Records, Vol. XXX, Part 3, p. 628; Part 4, p. 760.

his resources for the future. Ironically, after all the talk earlier in the year of transferring troops from the Trans-Mississippi, the troops paroled at Vicksburg which had originally come from the states west of the Mississippi, with the exception of Missouri, were sent home to await their exchange and so were lost to the western armies.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, some attempts to force Rosecrans to abandon Chattanooga were made. Bragg sent his cavalry under Wheeler to attack the Union supply lines. Wheeler's sweep through Middle Tennessee succeeded only in using up his cavalry in a series of debilitating marches. Johnston planned to use his large contingent of cavalry to strike out from northern Alabama in support of Wheeler. But, S. D. Lee, in command of Johnston's cavalry, abandoned his raid when he heard about the condition of Wheeler's command.⁸⁰

By mid-November, when the strong Union reinforcements sent to aid Chattanooga were in place, the Confederates were not able to effectively oppose the Northerners. Indeed, the morale of the Rebel forces surrounding Chattanooga was so poor that the Southerners, for the first time, were actually routed en masse from the field of battle. The Army of Tennessee was also dangerously

⁷⁹Ibid., Vol. XXIV, Part 3, p. 1060.

⁸⁰Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 269-270.

weakened by the absence of one third of its troops. Bragg, determined as much to have Longstreet removed from his army as he was interested in reoccupying East Tennessee, had sent Longstreet and his corps to advance against Burnside's army at Knoxville. The result of this strategic tangent was to ensure the Confederate defeat at Chattanooga, as well as removing Longstreet from any further effective strategic role in the West. Longstreet was held at bay in front of Knoxville and then forced to retreat along the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad into the northern Tennessee Valley once he was isolated by the Union victory at Chattanooga on November 23-25.⁸¹

The final campaigns of 1863 had come almost as an anti-climax to the victory at Chickamauga. The battle in September had shown what inter-departmental co-operation had the potential to do. Richmond was forced to concede that concentration of various forces throughout the South was necessary for Confederate survival. Yet the last months of 1863 saw little change in the Confederate departmental policy. When the crisis was passed, the system was allowed to remain unchanged. After the Union victory at Chattanooga the pace of the war slowed down as both sides went into winter quarters. It remained to be seen how the Confederates would rebuild their various

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 262-264, 267; E. P. Alexander, "Longstreet at Knoxville", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. III, pp. 746-751.

western command structures for the oncoming struggles of the next year.

CHAPTER IV

DEFEAT IN THE WEST

4.1 THE CAMPAIGN FOR ATLANTA

On November 29, 1863 Braxton Bragg put in a request to be relieved of his command. After the disaster at Chattanooga it was obvious that he no longer could be retained in charge of the Army of Tennessee. Bragg's resignation set off a round of discussion as to who his successor should be. Finally, after a sometimes acrimonious debate, which included Davis, his Cabinet, and a number of leading Congressmen, it was decided to give the command to Joseph Johnston. On December 18 Johnston received orders to hand over his command to General Polk and then proceed to northern Georgia to take up his new assignment. Bragg, still a favourite of Jefferson Davis, was appointed as the President's Chief-of-Staff.¹

Johnston was forced to deal with a number of problems in his new role as commander of the Department of Tennessee. One of the most contentious faced him almost as soon as he arrived in Dalton, where the Army of Tennessee had taken up position for the winter. Two days

¹Govan and Livingood, A Different Valor, pp. 235-239; Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, p. 261.

before Christmas, Davis wrote Johnston urging him to take the offensive as soon as possible.² But for Johnston an offensive by the Army of Tennessee was simply out of the question. The morale of the army had been broken by the disaster at Chattanooga the previous fall, and more importantly, logistical problems negated any thoughts of a move against the Federals. The effective logistical base of the Department of Tennessee had shrunk to an area encompassed by the line of the Georgia and the Atlanta and West Point Railroads to the south, the Alabama-Georgia state line to the west, and the 83rd Meridian to the east.³ Because of these constricting boundaries the task of rebuilding the Army of Tennessee was made that much more difficult. In contrast, the neighbouring Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, although relatively devoid of troops, retained large areas of land that could have been used for logistical support. Likewise, the rich Black Belt region of Alabama was in the adjacent department now under Polk.⁴

In spite of these problems Johnston continued to be pressured to take the offensive. Through the course of the winter several different plans were presented to the

²Official Records, Vol. XXXI, Part 3, p. 856.

³Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, pp. 178, 199.

⁴Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, p. 156.

commander of the Army of Tennessee. The first of these, formulated by P. G. T. Beauregard, proposed a concentration in Dalton of troops drawn from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Mississippi. Thus reinforced, the Army of Tennessee was to advance into Middle Tennessee and break up Sherman's line of communications.⁵

Next, a series of proposals by Longstreet suggested that his corps advance from East Tennessee into Kentucky as a precursor to a move by Johnston into Middle Tennessee. Longstreet's motives, however, may have had more to do with self-promotion than with strategic foresight. In December of 1863 the Department of East Tennessee had been recreated under Longstreet's command. The reconstitution of this department on one hand simply recognized the effective separation of this region from the army in northern Georgia, yet at the same time it added to the problems of co-ordinating any offensive actions.⁶ Indicative of the confusion over exact responsibilities in this region was the fact that the proper boundaries of this command were not fully spelled out until the 1st of February.⁷

⁵Ibid., pp. 142-145; James McDonough and James Jones, War So Terrible, Sherman and Atlanta (New York, 1987), p. 69.

⁶Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 157-158.

⁷Official Records, Vol. XXXII, Part 2, p. 644.

A third plan by Polk proposed an advance by him from northern Mississippi or Alabama after he had been reinforced from Dalton. At the same time Longstreet was to move into central Kentucky. Polk may have been emboldened by the reorganization of his command in late February. On January 28 the Department of the Gulf, the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, and the Department of the West were formally combined into a new command entitled the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana. While this change did not materially improve Polk's overall command, which comprised approximately 25000 effectives, it served to untangle the ambiguous chain of command which had been in existence until then.⁸

Meanwhile in Richmond a plan was put together by Davis that projected a march by Johnston to a point south of Knoxville and then, in conjunction with Longstreet, a movement into Middle Tennessee. To aid Johnston he would be reinforced with 5000 men from Polk and 10000 more from Beauregard.⁹

Johnston responded to all of these proposals in the same way. He repeatedly stated that the Army of Tennessee was much too weak to undertake any offensive action. He

⁸Ibid., pp. 813-814, 627, 582-583.

⁹Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 146-147; McDonough and Jones, War So Terrible, p. 69; Official Records, Vol. XXXII, Part 3, pp. 614-615.

was both short of food and Richmond had, in his opinion, severely overestimated his troop strength. Finally, Johnston argued that any strategy except that of defense was impossible due to a severe shortage of horses and wagons.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the fact that Richmond was sending out plans for offensive action was in itself an innovation. In the past both the President and the War Department had usually restricted themselves to at most ordering the transfer of reinforcements from one department to another in reaction to Northern movements. The strategic planning in early 1864 for an offensive therefore signalled a break with Davis' defensive outlook of the previous year. Although the means for carrying out these proposals were lacking, Davis appeared to have finally accepted the need for him to actively order inter-departmental troop movements as a precursor to Southern strategic initiatives.¹¹

Davis' role as an inter-departmental co-ordinator was tested in early February. Sherman, operating out of Vicksburg, suddenly struck eastward towards Meridian, Mississippi. By the 14th Sherman had reached his objective. Polk, uncertain of Federal intentions,

¹⁰Goff, Confederate Supply, pp. 204-207.

¹¹Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 147, 152.

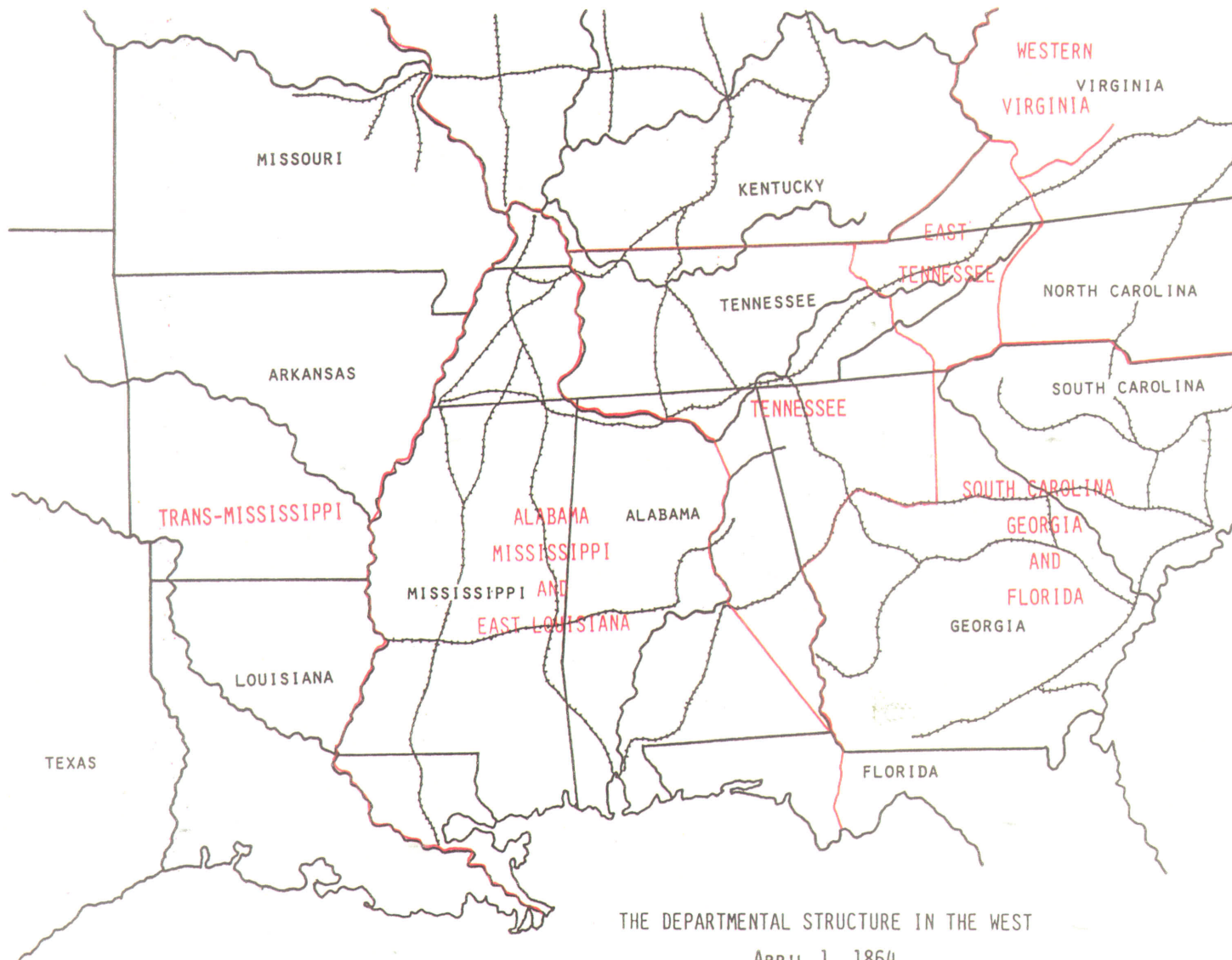
appealed for aid and Seddon replied from Richmond that reinforcements would be forthcoming. After requests to Johnston to send assistance to Mississippi were turned down Davis finally ordered Johnston to detach Hardee's Corps less one division and rush this infantry to Polk.¹²

Sherman had, however, outmaneuvered the Rebel forces. By the time the head of Hardee's column reached Mississippi Sherman had begun to withdraw the same way he had come, his aim accomplished with the destruction of the industrial and rail centre of Meridian. Delays by both Polk and Davis had enabled the Federal forces to ravage central Mississippi and then escape unscathed.¹³ In addition, Davis' initial reluctance to order Johnston to send aid to Mississippi called into question his desire to act with more resolve in co-ordinating inter-departmental affairs.

With the passing of the Meridian crisis Richmond resumed its push for an offensive by the army in northern Georgia. Presumably in response to Johnston's complaints of a lack of a proper logistical base, his department was enlarged on the 25th of March to include the western half of Alabama along a line running from Gunter's Landing on the Tennessee River, through Gadsen and then along the

¹²Official Records, Vol. XXXII, Part 2, pp. 716, 729, 751-752, 755; Vol. LII, Part 2, p. 621.

¹³Margie Bearss, Sherman's Forgotten Campaign, The Meridian Expedition (Baltimore, 1987), p. 177.



Coosa River to its junction with the Tallapoosa River. From here the boundary ran in a straight line to the intersection of the northern boundary of Florida with the Chattahoochee River. The Department of Tennessee also continued its jurisdiction over northern Alabama and northwestern Georgia.¹⁴

Although this increase in the extent of the Department of Tennessee gave it a larger region from which to draw supplies and manpower, its geographical boundaries still contradicted what Johnston saw as the strategic role of the Army of Tennessee - the defence of Atlanta. The vital production centres of Macon, Augusta, and Columbus remained under the control of the neighbouring Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The equally important factories in the Selma and Montgomery region of Alabama also did not come under Johnston's authority. Therefore, it can only be presumed that the authorities in Richmond hoped to pressure Johnston into capturing a new source of manpower and supplies for himself in Middle Tennessee.

Sherman's advance against Dalton in early May put an end to the strategic debate over what Johnston should do with his army. Even though Johnston appeared to hold a position of considerable natural strength, he immediately informed Richmond of his need for reinforcements. The War

¹⁴Official Records, Vol. XXXII, Part 3, pp. 673-674.

Department did not hesitate, and immediately ordered Polk to dispatch at least one division to Johnston's aid.¹⁵ Polk moved to comply, in spite of his earlier rejection of a suggestion that he send this same division to Johnston before, instead of after, it was needed. At the same time, Polk shifted his remaining infantry and one cavalry division into a position where they could protect the western flank of the Army of Tennessee.¹⁶

As pressure mounted against Johnston in northern Georgia he again called for help from outside his department. On May 8 he informed Polk that the need for him to move to Georgia together with his troops was a matter of the utmost importance. In response Polk undertook to shift his entire force of 10000 infantry and 4000 cavalry to Johnston's side. In Polk's absence command of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana devolved upon General S. D. Lee.¹⁷ Polk's arrival, along with other reinforcements from within the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana, allowed Johnston to form a third corps for his army. In addition Johnston also received aid from the Department of

¹⁵Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, Part 4, P. 660.

¹⁶Parks, General Leonidas Polk C.S.A., p. 372; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 332, 334.

¹⁷Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, Part 4, p. 680; Parks, General Leonidas Polk C.S.A., p. 373.

South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.¹⁸

After these reinforcements arrived, though he continued to be hard pressed by Sherman, Johnston received no more help from outside his department. In fact a dispute broke out between Richmond and Polk over the number of troops Polk had removed from his department. The War Department claimed that Polk had weakened the Southern position in Mississippi and Alabama by taking too many troops to Georgia. Polk replied that he had been ordered to take all available forces and, faced with a volatile situation in Georgia, he had exercised his discretion and taken more men east than his order required him to.¹⁹

This dispute was just the beginning of a long disagreement between the westerners and Richmond over the use of the forces in the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana to assist the embattled Army of Tennessee. As early as May 7, while Polk was still moving to join the Army of Tennessee at Dalton, Johnston had asked him if he could send a force of cavalry against Sherman's line of communication in Middle

¹⁸In addition to Polk's two infantry divisions and one cavalry division, Reynolds' and Quarles' Brigades were sent from Mobile, and Mercer's Brigade was dispatched from Savannah. Official Records, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 4, pp. 668, 732; E. C. Dawes, "The Confederate Strength in the Atlanta Campaign", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. IV, p. 281.

¹⁹Parks, General Leonidas Polk C.S.A., p. 373.

Tennessee. Three days later he repeated the request to Polk's successor S. D. Lee, claiming that such a raid, if successful, might produce great results. Johnston's desire to destroy the Middle Tennessee rail line along which Sherman was drawing his supplies was based upon intelligence reports which stated that the line was extremely vulnerable. Only four Federal cavalry regiments protected the route; infantry garrisons had been stripped as troops were concentrated in Chattanooga.²⁰

As Sherman advanced and his line of communication continued to lengthen it was increasingly felt by the commander of the Army of Tennessee that the best chance for forcing Sherman back lay in destroying his rail links with the North. To this end Johnston continued to repeatedly request that the cavalry in the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana, or in the Department of East Tennessee, be sent raiding into Middle Tennessee. Johnston knew that by the 1st of June S. D. Lee had under his command 15000 cavalry. Of these over half were part of Forrest's cavalry, which had already spent much of the month of May recruiting and strengthening themselves in northern Mississippi and

²⁰J. P. Dyer, "Some Aspects of Cavalry Operations in the Army of Tennessee", The Journal of Southern History, Vol. VIII, No. 2 (1942), p. 217; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 374.

western Tennessee.²¹

Despite this potential to halt the Union advance in northern Georgia, no movement against the Northern line of communication was undertaken by the troops in Mississippi. Sherman, well aware of the havoc Confederate horsemen could wreak, dispatched a series of raids into northern Mississippi and Alabama with the sole objective of forcing the Southern cavalry to fight in their own defense. At the very time Johnston was appealing for help in June, Forrest was being kept busy by a Union column under General Samuel Sturgis. Forrest defeated Sturgis, but immediately Sherman brought together another force of some 14000 men and sent them into northern Mississippi. To counter this threat S. D. Lee united some 10000 of his cavalry and engaged the Unionists in an indecisive battle at Tupelo, Mississippi on July 14.²²

Sherman's series of raids, although repeatedly turned back, succeeded in their objective. Lee had initially contemplated an expedition against Sherman's communications. On the 16th of May he had gone so far as to report to Johnston that Forrest would advance into

²¹Ibid,, p. 376; Official Records, Vol. XXXIX, Part 2, p. 630; Thomas Jordan and J. P. Pryor, The Campaigns of Lieutenant General N. B. Forrest and of Forrest's Cavalry, (1868, rpr. Dayton, Ohio, 1977), pp. 458-459.

²²Dyer, "Some Aspects of Cavalry Operations in the Army of Tennessee", p. 218; W. S. Burns, "A. J. Smith's Defeat of Forrest at Tupelo", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. IV, pp. 421-422.

Middle Tennessee in four days. Two days later, however, the orders for the raid were countermanded in the face of the impending threat of a Federal raid from Tennessee.²³

A second attempt to mount a raid under Forrest's command also faltered at the beginning of the next month. On June 3 Lee received news of a large Union column moving out of Memphis. Forrest was hurriedly ordered to abandon his raid into Middle Tennessee and return to northern Mississippi. At Brice's Cross Roads, on June 10, Forrest routed the Federal force under General Sturgis. In spite of its defeat, therefore, this expedition had removed the possibility of Lee aiding Johnston. On June 18 Lee announced that no invasion of Middle Tennessee would take place as long as a threat to Mississippi remained.²⁴

Sherman's cavalry raids also had a profound effect on President Davis and General Bragg. Davis especially feared the consequences of ordering Lee to move out of his department into Middle Tennessee. Since Polk's infantry had left the Mississippi and Alabama region any expedition by Lee would uncover the vital iron and munitions producing area in central Alabama. Davis' long-standing

²³Official Records, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 4, pp. 719, 729-730.

²⁴Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 379; Thomas R. Hay, "Davis, Bragg and Johnston in the Atlanta Campaign", Georgia Historical Quarterly, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (1924), p. 43; Official Records, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 4, p. 750; Vol. XXXIX, Part 2, p. 655.

aversion to the yielding up of any territory also made him hold back from issuing orders which potentially might have resulted in allowing a Northern advance into his home state of Mississippi. Instead, Davis told Lee that he must use his own discretion on the matter. Lee, by training not a cavalryman and inexperienced in his duties, was intimidated by the constant threat of Federal raids. As a consequence he remained on the defensive, dispersing his men in a long defensive cordon stretching from south-central Mississippi to northern Alabama.²⁵

The Department of East Tennessee, from where Johnston had also hoped to direct a raid into Middle Tennessee, was to prove equally disappointing. The physical condition of the 4000 cavalrymen in the department was very poor. During the winter and spring two of the four brigades had been sent into North Carolina to find sustenance and horses. The remaining brigades were short of weapons, horses, and men.²⁶ The department's command was also in a state of confusion. From April to August of 1864 six different officers controlled the Department of East Tennessee. One of them was killed in action and three of them simultaneously commanded the neighbouring Department of Western Virginia. As in Mississippi, a series of Union

²⁵Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 377-381; Dyer, "Some Aspects of Cavalry Operations in the Army of Tennessee", p. 219.

²⁶Official Records, Vol. XXII, Part 3, pp. 842-846.

raids into the department put the Rebels on the defensive. It was not until late June that the Department of East Tennessee was able to launch a raid against the Northerners. This raid by General John Morgan was directed into Kentucky, however, and proved of no use to Johnston; it only resulted in the destruction of the raiders themselves.²⁷

By mid-summer Sherman had penetrated deep into northern Georgia. Johnston, falling back in front of this advance, allowed the Federal forces to come dangerously close to the industrial regions of the central deep South. The administration in Richmond rapidly lost all confidence in the commander of the Army of Tennessee. Much of this loss of confidence can be blamed directly on Johnston. He apparently was unable to offer any plan of defense to Richmond. Davis, aware that the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana and the departments on the Atlantic coast had been stripped bare of infantry to support the Army of Tennessee and the Army of Northern Virginia, anxiously looked to Johnston to stop Sherman. Johnston, however, lost both men and ground as he fell back from one defensive position to another. When queried by Richmond as to his intentions all he could offer was

²⁷Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. I, p. 177; Husley, "The Department of Western Virginia: Guardian of the Alleghenies", pp. 270-272; Basil W. Duke, "John Morgan in 1864", Johnson and Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders, Vol. IV, p. 424.

that what he did depended on Sherman's actions.²⁸

But by the time Johnston gave this reply to Richmond he was on the northern outskirts of Atlanta. He had already passed up several opportunities to turn on Sherman. At Cassville, two weeks after the campaign had opened, he had refused to attack Sherman because of the reluctance of some of his subordinates. Likewise, he had abandoned his fortified position on the north bank of the Chattahoochee without a fight.²⁹ Johnston also did nothing to conciliate the officials in Richmond. The rancorous debate during the previous winter over the question of a Rebel offensive had shaken Davis' support for Johnston. Johnston's confusing statements about his actual strength also led to questions about his competence. On June 10 the returns of the Army of Tennessee reported 60465 effective infantry, cavalry and artillery, but at the same time reported a total aggregate strength of 82413 men. Johnston never explained the difference of 22000 troops.³⁰

²⁸Richard McMurry, "'The Enemy at Richmond': Joseph E. Johnston and the Confederate Government", Civil War History, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (1981), p. 29; McDonough and Jones, War So Terrible, p. 203; Official Records, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 5, p. 883.

²⁹Thomas R. Hay, "The Davis-Hood-Johnston Controversy of 1864", Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. XI, No. 1 (1924), p. 69; Govan and Livingood, A Different Valor, pp. 301, 306-307; McDonough and Jones, War So Terrible, pp. 200, 201-203.

³⁰Official Records, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 3, p. 77.

Finally, as Johnston positioned his army within the northern fortifications of Atlanta, Davis moved against him. The order replacing Johnston concisely summarized the government's unhappiness with him, "as you have failed to arrest the advance of the enemy to the vicinity of Atlanta, far in the interior of Georgia, and express no confidence that you can defeat or repel him, you are hereby relieved from the command of the Army and Department of Tennessee, which you will immediately turn over to General Hood".³¹

Hood, if nothing else, promised that he would fight. In a letter to Bragg, written a few days before his appointment to army command, he criticized the abandonment of northern Georgia and said that under no circumstances should the Federals be permitted to gain the city of Atlanta. The Northerners must be brought to battle even if this entailed taking reckless chances.³² And Hood was willing to take these chances. From the 20th to the 28th of July the Army of Tennessee sortied out from the defenses of Atlanta three times, but each assault was turned back by the Federals. By the end of July the Army of Tennessee had sustained a total of 19000 casualties in these abortive attempts to defeat Sherman. Forced to pause to rebuild and regroup, Hood withdrew into the

³¹Ibid., Part 4, p. 885.

³²Ibid., Part 5, pp. 879-880.

Atlanta fortifications.³³

Concurrent with Hood's ascension to command the War Department took action to transfer troops from the Trans-Mississippi Department. No such movement of men had taken place since 1862, but on July 22 orders were issued to General Richard Taylor to move two divisions of infantry across the Mississippi; any other infantry which could be spared was to follow as soon as possible.³⁴ Kirby Smith, commanding the Trans-Mississippi Department, reluctantly began to comply with this order. Nevertheless, he managed to have the force which was to be transferred reduced from 9000 to 4000 men. Delays in gathering the necessary boats needed to cross the Mississippi led to word of the impending move reaching the Federals. They immediately increased their river patrols, and on August 22 the entire operation was called off when Davis disavowed any knowledge of the planned movement. Upon further investigation it was determined that the plan to shift the Trans-Mississippi troops had been originated solely by Bragg.³⁵

Hood, frustrated in his attempt to defeat Sherman on the field of battle, turned to another means to strike at

³³Richard McMurry, John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence, (Lexington, Kentucky, 1982), p. 134.

³⁴Official Records., Vol. XLI, Part 1, p. 90.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 92-93, 95-96, 108, 112, 117; Kirby, Kirby Smith's Confederacy, pp. 329-331.

the Northern army. Hood had been impressed with the inadequacy of the Union cavalry in the recent fighting around Atlanta. Accordingly, he felt he could safely dispatch his own cavalry under Wheeler against Sherman's line of communication. To assist Wheeler's mounted force Hood requested support from the neighbouring Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana. But as before, this request did not have the desired result. S. D. Lee had been, on Hood's promotion to command of the Army of Tennessee, transferred to take over Hood's Corps on July 26. Accordingly Richmond had issued orders to General Richard Taylor to assume command of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana, but Taylor was delayed in taking up his new posting by the scheme to transfer troops across the Mississippi. Combined with this confusion in the department's command structure yet another Federal raid was launched into northern Mississippi. Hood's appeal went unanswered.³⁶

Wheeler's raid proved to be badly mismanaged. Taking along about 4500 men, Wheeler planned to destroy the Western and Atlantic Railroad south of Chattanooga and then cross into Middle Tennessee. Wheeler left Atlanta on August 10. After some early successes in northern Georgia Wheeler pushed on into Tennessee by a circuitous route

³⁶McDonough and Jones, War So Terrible, p. 286; Official Records, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 5, pp. 912, 917; Vol. XXXIX, Part 2, p. 778.

that exhausted his troops. As a result he was unable to accomplish his objectives in the Volunteer State, returning to the Army of Tennessee in September with his troops badly demoralized and weakened to a strength of only 1000 men.³⁷

With Hood besieged in Atlanta, the government in Richmond finally undertook to provide the Army of Tennessee with a geographical command more suited to its assignment. The Department of Tennessee was expanded to the south and east to take in all of northern Georgia north and west of a line running along the Augusta and Savannah Railroad from Augusta to Millen, then along the western boundaries of Bulloch and Tattnall counties and the south bank of the Ocmulgee River to the northeast corner of Irwin county. From there the line of demarcation proceeded south to the Florida state line and followed along that border to the Appalachicola River.³⁸ Under the new name of the Department of Tennessee and Georgia this extension marked the first time that the Army of Tennessee included in its logistical base the vital central Georgian industrial centres of Augusta, Macon and Columbus. But this change in boundaries, potentially a

³⁷McDonough and Jones, War So Terrible, pp. 286-287; Dyer, "Some Aspects of Cavalry Operations in the Army of Tennessee", p. 220; Official Records, Vol. XXXIX, Part 2, p. 859.

³⁸Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, Part 2, pp. 777-778.

source of additional strength for Hood, came too late to be of any help. Hood was forced to evacuate Atlanta on the 1st of September.

The failure to retain the city was as much a failure of his generalship as it was a failure of the system that was preventing all Confederate forces in the western region to be brought to bear against Sherman. Davis' adamant refusal to order S. D. Lee to aid the Army of Tennessee when it still was in northern Georgia seriously weakened the efforts of both Johnston and Hood. The bureaucratic debacle over the movement of reinforcements from the Trans-Mississippi Department also indicates the continuation of the lack of inter-departmental coordination.

Davis' actions can be partially explained by understanding that he badly misread the Federal intentions in the spring of 1864. He overemphasized the Northern threat facing first Polk and then S. D. Lee, and did not realize that the main thrust of the Union forces in the West was to be directed against Atlanta. Ironically, while in 1862 and 1863 Davis erroneously felt that the North could not advance simultaneously in both Mississippi and Tennessee, he now mistakenly believed that such an advance was likely.³⁹ Davis' earlier emphasis on an

³⁹Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 294-295; Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 168-169, 190-191.

offensive by the Army of Tennessee also contributed to his reluctance to deal with inter-departmental difficulties. When Davis' plans for an offensive into Tennessee proved unworkable the President appeared to lose his determination to order inter-departmental co-operation. What Davis apparently did not yet see was that an offensive was impossible as long as the resources for such a move were scattered throughout various departments.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 168-169, 173-174.

4.2 THE END IN THE WEST

In the days following the loss of Atlanta, Hood began examining his options for a new strategy. The direction his plans were taking are evident in a request he made on September 6 that the Union prisoners-of-war at Andersonville in southern Georgia be moved so that he would be able to maneuver against the Northern lines of communication without the need of keeping his army between Sherman and the prison. At the same time he suggested that Davis should come out west to consult on future operations.⁴¹

On September 25 Davis arrived at Palmetto, Georgia to inspect the Army of Tennessee and meet with Hood. Here Davis moved first to confirm his support for Hood as commander of the army. Although Hood proposed to resign his position after the fall of Atlanta, Davis now publicly chose not to accept this offer.⁴² Hood then went on to lay out his plans as to what to do about Sherman. Hood was determined to assume the offensive before Sherman could regain the initiative, and so he argued against remaining south of Atlanta any longer than absolutely necessary. Instead, Hood stated that in order to restore the army's morale an immediate advance should take place.

⁴¹Official Records, Vol. XXXVII, Part 5, pp. 1023-1024.

⁴²John B. Hood, Advance and Retreat, (1879, rpr. Bloomington, Ind., 1959), p. 254.

Davis agreed with Hood, feeling that an aggressive strategy was essential to restore Confederate fortunes in the West.⁴³ Therefore, according to Hood's proposal, the Army of Tennessee should be shifted north against the Union supply line and thus force Sherman to abandon Atlanta. After destroying the Federal communications in northern Georgia, the Rebels would take up a position near the Alabama-Georgia state line on the terminus of the Alabama and Tennessee River Railroad and await Sherman's attack. If Sherman did not follow Hood from Atlanta the Confederates would then be in the perfect position to fall upon Sherman's rear. Finally, if Sherman sent part of his army north to protect Tennessee, Hood felt certain that the Union troops remaining in Georgia could be defeated and driven north.⁴⁴

After three days Davis left the Army of Tennessee and travelled west to meet with Richard Taylor, now in command of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana. As Hood's projected advance would force him to draw supplies from Taylor's department, Davis was anxious to establish just what Taylor would be able to contribute

⁴³Thomas R. Hay, Hood's Tennessee Campaign, (New York, 1929), p. 20; William Cooper Jr., "A Reassessment of Jefferson Davis as War Leader: The Case from Atlanta to Nashville", The Journal of Southern History, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (1970), p. 198.

⁴⁴Hood, Advance and Retreat, pp. 254-255; Black, The Railroads of the Confederacy, p. 264.

to the success of Hood's offensive. Taylor was not optimistic. In response to a query from Davis he stated that he did not see any possibility of drawing reinforcements from the Trans-Mississippi. All he could offer was the promise of a raid by Forrest into Tennessee and the transfer of 4000 infantry from the defenses of Mobile to the Army of Tennessee.⁴⁵ On the question of supplies Taylor was somewhat more positive. The rail line from Selma to Blue Mountain in northern Alabama would be able to sustain the Army of Tennessee during Hood's initial move against Sherman's communications in northern Georgia. As well, should it be necessary for Hood to move further west, the line of the Mobile and Ohio was operational as far north as Corinth, Mississippi.⁴⁶

At the same time as these consultations were going on Davis began to restructure the western commands. On October 1 the Department of Tennessee and Georgia was relieved of its authority over any part of Alabama.⁴⁷ This shift in the boundaries between the Department of Tennessee and Georgia and the Department of Alabama,

⁴⁵Forrest had already started northward on his raid, crossing the Tennessee River on the 21st of September. Jordan and Pryor, The Campaigns of Lieutenant General N. B. Forrest, pp. 557-561; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, pp. 250-252.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 248, 251; Black, The Railroads of the Confederacy, p. 264.

⁴⁷Official Records, Vol. XXXIX, Part 3, p. 779.

Mississippi and East Louisiana, however, forced the Army of Tennessee to operate on the very edge of its geographical jurisdiction. If Hood was to maneuver against Federal rail lines in northern Georgia, Sherman's army would lie between the Rebel army and the bulk of its departmental base. But, as Hood was already receiving all of his logistical support from Taylor's command, this change in structure was of little immediate consequence.

More importantly, Davis sought to reinstate a multi-departmental command in the West. General P. G. T. Beauregard met with Davis in Augusta on October 2. Davis outlined the strategy that he and Hood had agreed upon and then offered Beauregard the leadership of a new command, the Military Division of the West, which would encompass both Hood's Department of Tennessee and Georgia and Taylor's Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana.⁴⁸ Beauregard, albeit reluctantly, accepted this new posting.

Several reasons existed for the creation of this new department. To begin with, Hood was seen as a liability by segments of both the army and the western civilian population. The appointment of Beauregard served to dampen any criticism of Hood; Beauregard would provide a measure of both guidance and restraint to the commander of

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 782.

the Army of Tennessee.⁴⁹ Beauregard would also serve to co-ordinate logistics in the two western departments and, most importantly, he would serve to ensure the fullest co-operation between the troops under Hood and Taylor.⁵⁰

Yet several important restrictions were placed on Beauregard. His orders authorized him to operate "wherever in your judgement the interests of your command render it expedient".⁵¹ But he was to exercise actual command of any troops only when he was present with the army in question. As well, only in time of crisis was he to interfere with the generals in the field, a reference specifically to Hood. In the end, Beauregard, like Johnston two years earlier, felt profoundly uncertain of how he was supposed to perform his duties. A structure which gave him general authority over a geographical command instead of a specific army left him unsure of himself and his assignment.⁵²

Even as Beauregard began to undertake his new responsibilities problems in the Rebel strategy began to surface. Hood's move into northern Georgia was successful in drawing Sherman northward to protect his line of

⁴⁹Cooper, "A Reassessment of Jefferson Davis as War Leader: The Case from Atlanta to Nashville", p. 201.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Official Records, Vol. XXXIX, part 3, p. 782.

⁵²Ibid.; Hay, Hood's Tennessee Campaign, p. 29; Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard, pp. 241-242.

communication. But Hood, instead of then attempting to bring Sherman to battle, began to plan an advance north to the Tennessee River in northern Alabama.⁵³ To this end Hood requested that the Memphis and Charleston Railroad be repaired up to Decatur, Alabama, allowing him to be supplied via the round about route leading north to Corinth and then east to Decatur.⁵⁴

On October 9, Beauregard and Hood met to discuss their strategy. Hood appears to have left Beauregard out of his plans, not telling him that he intended to move further northward. Beauregard, assuming that Hood still intended to force Sherman to attack him, departed to try to ensure that the Army of Tennessee could maintain a source of supplies from central Alabama.⁵⁵ One week later, Hood, without further consultation with Richmond or Beauregard, made the final decision to advance into Tennessee. Feeling that the Army of Tennessee was in no condition to face Sherman in battle and fearful of losing the initiative he saw no choice but to continue to move north, hopefully forcing Sherman to follow him.⁵⁶

⁵³Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 481; Official Records, Vol. XXXIX, Part 3, pp. 804-805.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 805; Black, The Railroads of the Confederacy, p. 264.

⁵⁵McMurry, John Bell Hood, p. 160.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 161-162; Hood, Advance and Retreat, pp. 263-264.

If Sherman did not chose to follow him, however, Hood still proposed to invade Middle Tennessee. This abandoned the strategy decided on by Hood and Davis at the beginning of the month. Nevertheless, Beauregard, finally meeting with Hood on October 20, reluctantly gave his approval to Hood's new plan, urging his subordinate to move with the utmost speed so as to be in Middle Tennessee before the Northerners were prepared to oppose him.⁵⁷

When Hood advanced to the line of the Tennessee River he again neglected to communicate his intentions to Beauregard. Instead of marching to Guntersville, he approached the Tennessee River at Tuscumbia, ninety miles further west in Alabama than originally planned.⁵⁸ Here the Army of Tennessee came to a halt. It did not resume the advance until the 19th of November, a delay of almost three weeks.

During this period Beauregard sought to provide Hood with more troops and a reliable source of supplies. As a first step he ordered Forrest to join his cavalry with the Army of Tennessee. Forrest's cavalry was needed because Wheeler, having returned from his long raid into Tennessee, was kept in Georgia to oppose Sherman's army. Forrest was delayed, however, and only arrived in

⁵⁷Cooper, "A Reassessment of Jefferson Davis as War Leader: The Case from Atlanta to Nashville", p. 202; Official Records, Vol. XLV, Part 1, pp. 647-648.

⁵⁸McMurry, John Bell Hood, pp. 164-165.

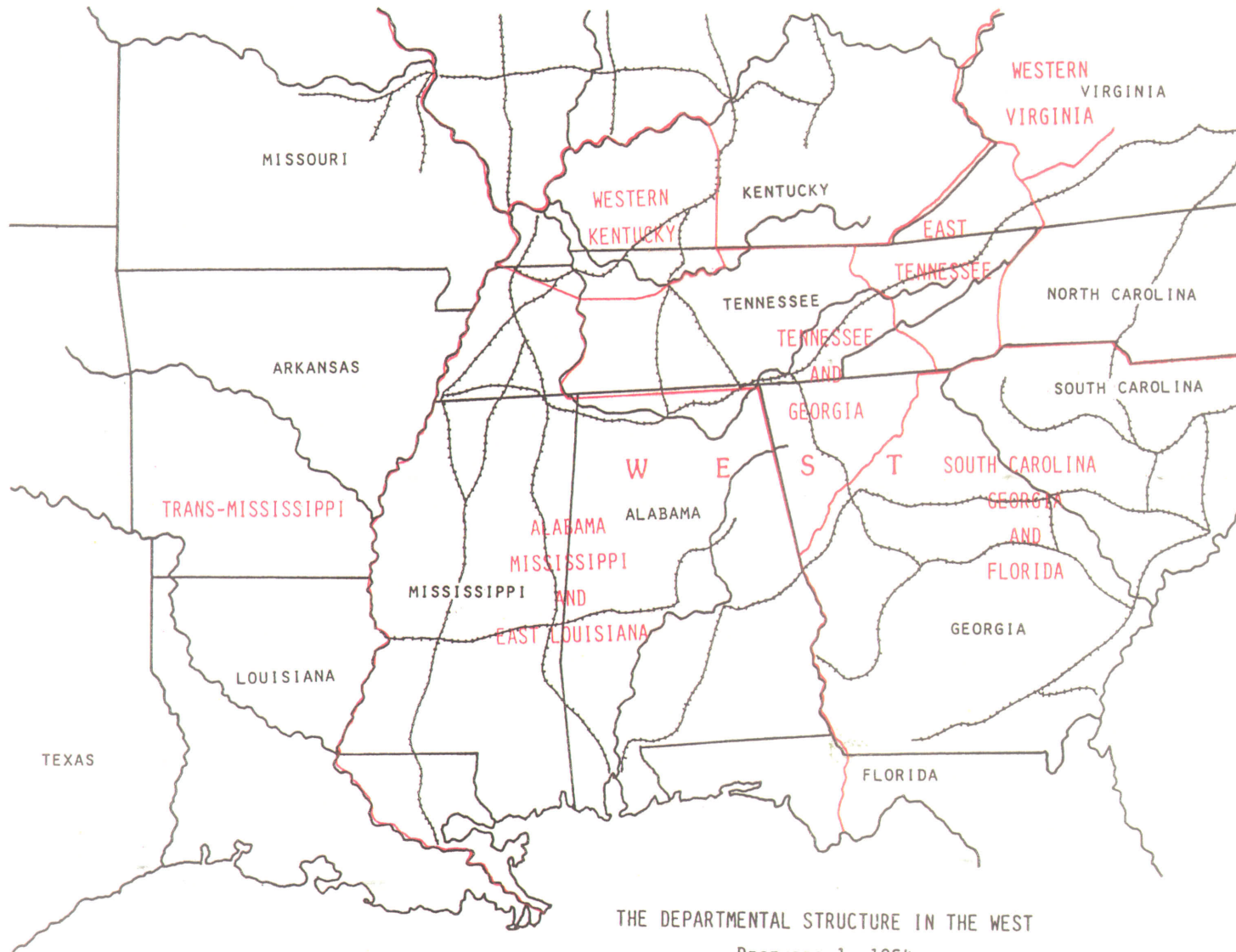
Tuscumbia on the 18th of November.⁵⁹ Beauregard's efforts to provide logistical support for the Army of Tennessee were also slow to bear results. On the 23rd of October he ordered the repair and refurbishing of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad east of Corinth. Progress was slow, by the 18th of the following month the line was completed only up to Barton, Alabama, still twelve miles short of Tuscumbia. Thus Hood was forced to wait and accumulate supplies for three vital weeks before he was again able to begin any offensive actions.⁶⁰

Elsewhere in his command Beauregard also faced mounting problems. As Hood marched the Army of Tennessee north to the Tennessee River, Sherman began his preparations to march across Georgia. In response Beauregard made efforts to gather a force to stop Sherman. He hoped to bring together a combination of state militia, convalescents, cavalry, and reinforcements from the Atlantic coast. In his estimation there would be a total of approximately 30000 men available. As it was this estimate was highly optimistic; not even one half of the anticipated men were obtained.⁶¹ Nevertheless, on

⁵⁹Jordan and Pryor, The Campaigns of Lieutenant General N. B. Forrest, pp. 606-608; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 485.

⁶⁰Black, The Railroads of the Confederacy, pp. 264-266; Goff, Confederate Supply, p. 217.

⁶¹Official Records, Vol. XLIV, pp. 932-933; Hood, Advance and Retreat, p. 281.



November 16 Taylor was ordered east into the Department of Tennessee and Georgia to assume command of all troops operating against Sherman. Then fears that Taylor would be delayed led Beauregard to request that this command be given instead to Hardee, commander of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. On November 17 this department was reconfigured to include all of Georgia south of the Chattahoochee River. At the same time the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida was put under the jurisdiction of the Military Division of the West. Taylor was temporarily relegated to simply inspecting the troops in Georgia.⁶²

At the end of November Beauregard also moved east to try to provide some co-ordination to the Rebel forces in Georgia. His efforts were in vain, by the end of the year Sherman had reached the Atlantic coast at Savannah. Beauregard failed to halt Sherman in part because neither he nor Davis could divine what Sherman intended to do. In addition, Southern forces were badly scattered throughout The Military Division of the West in Mobile, Montgomery, Macon, Augusta and Savannah; only a rapid concentration of these forces might have been able to stop Sherman, but this Beauregard was not able to do. The deplorable

⁶²Official Records, Vol. XLIV, p. 859, 863, 866; Amann (ed.), Personnel of the Civil War, Vol. 1, p. 197; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p. 257.

condition of the Southern rail network made that an impossibility.⁶³

On the 31st of December Richmond granted Beauregard's request that his command be relieved of responsibility for the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, leaving him free to concentrate on the problems facing him further to the West. Because it was realized that the troops in the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida would have to fall back into South Carolina when Sherman again took up his advance, the Department of Tennessee and Georgia was left in command of Georgia west of a line along the Georgia Railroad from Augusta through Warrenton, Sparta, and Milledgeville to the Ocmulgee River, down this same river to the western boundary of Coffee County, and then down the course of the Allapaha and Suwannee Rivers to the Gulf.⁶⁴

The confusion that plagued the western commands was also reflected in the brief creation of the Department of Western Kentucky. This department was established in early September of 1864 to provide Brigadier General A. R. Johnson with a legal framework to enforce conscription behind Union lines in western Kentucky. Johnson was replaced by Brigadier General H. B. Lyon the following

⁶³Official Records, Vol. XLIV, pp. 866, 890; Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard, pp. 245-248.

⁶⁴Official Records, Vol. XLIV, p.1009-1010; Vol. XLVII, Part 2, p. 991.

month when the War Department was informed that Johnson had been captured.⁶⁵ Lyon only moved to take up his position in November and did not enter the region of his jurisdiction until early December. His command never rose above 800 men, but for two months he conducted a guerrilla campaign in the area of Kentucky west of the Tennessee River, threatening Union supply lines along the Ohio River.⁶⁶

Hood's campaign into Tennessee proved to be crucial for the western Confederacy. Moving north once again on the 19th of November, Hood almost trapped the main Union force in the field at Spring Hill, but his failure here was quickly followed a disastrous assault at Franklin at the end of the month. The destruction of the Army of Tennessee in front of Nashville in mid-December crushed the last hopes in the western Confederacy.

Hood's conduct during the invasion of Tennessee, in addition to his poor tactical handling of his troops, only served to add to the strategic problems in the West. Hood completely neglected to communicate with Beauregard, leaving the commander of the Military Division of the West unable to provide any strategic co-ordination at all. This situation culminated when Hood neglected to file a

⁶⁵Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, Part 2, p. 817; Vol. XLIX, Part 1, p. 960.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 959-960; Vol. XLV, Part 1, pp. 803-806.

report after his defeat at Nashville in mid-December. Both Beauregard and the War Department heard nothing about the state of affairs in Middle Tennessee until General Taylor sent in a report following his visit to the remnants of the Army of Tennessee in January, 1865.⁶⁷

The remaining months in the life of the western Confederacy saw a number of rapid changes in the various departmental commands in the region. However, these changes did not serve any effective purpose. The area between the Mississippi River and central Georgia was simply waiting for the end which would come with the Federal spring offensives. In January Hood was relieved of his command and Taylor was put in charge of the Army of Tennessee. Davis left Beauregard in control of the Military Division of the West, but in late January Beauregard was also put in command of the remnants of the Army of Tennessee and ordered to move eastward to help oppose Sherman's advance in the Carolinas. By the end of February, Beauregard's men were spread out along the rail lines from Georgia to North Carolina.⁶⁸ Taylor retained his jurisdiction over the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana, which still maintained a

⁶⁷Connelly, Autumn of Glory, pp. 512-518; Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard, pp. 248-249; Official Records, Vol. XLIV, pp. 989, 993, Vol. XLV, Part 2, pp. 772, 785.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 784-785; Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 521; Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 166-167.

strength of approximately 20000 to 30000 men. Taylor also temporarily commanded the Department of Tennessee and Georgia although there remained few troops within this region apart from Beauregard's slow moving reinforcements for the East.⁶⁹

The net effect of these arrangements was that Beauregard and Taylor commanded the same territory at the same time. The situation was further confused on February 22, when Joseph Johnston was once again called into service and given the command of both the Department of Tennessee and Georgia and the adjacent Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Beauregard, now with the bulk of his troops within the latter department, came under Johnston's authority while still remaining in command of the Military Division of the West.⁷⁰ These confused command structures only served to weaken the meager flow of reinforcements to Johnston in the Carolinas. When he surrendered in April of 1865 Johnston had only an army of 31200 men, even though in the western departments between 40000 and 50000 more men remained to surrender a few weeks later.⁷¹

The end in the West came quickly in the spring. The

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 167.

⁷⁰Official Records, Vol. XLVII, Part 2, p. 1247.

⁷¹Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command, pp. 88-89.

only areas in the western Confederacy which were still largely untouched by Union forces were the Montgomery-Selma region and the city of Mobile. The former was defended by Forrest's cavalry, the latter by several brigades from the Army of Tennessee under General Maury.⁷² In the final week of March both commands were put to the test. Forrest's cavalry was crushed in front of Selma by an overwhelming Union force on the 2nd of April. At Mobile the garrison was forced to withdraw from the city after a brief siege. On May 8 Taylor, upon hearing of the surrender of both the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of Tennessee, sought terms with the Union commander, General Edward Canby.⁷³

Davis' attempt to try to provide the western Confederacy with a cohesive command structure in the fall of 1864 proved in the end to be a failure. Beauregard was unable to use his authority to try to concentrate the few remaining Southern resources against the advancing Northerners. He instead allowed Hood to dictate both the planning and execution of strategy. Hood used this lack of restraint to its utmost, and in the end he wrecked the Army of Tennessee. The confusing chain of command which

⁷²Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, pp. 267-268; Official Records, Vol. XL, Part 1, pp. 1045-1048.

⁷³Jordan and Pryor, The Campaigns of Lieutenant General N. B. Forrest, pp. 672-676; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, pp. 270-271, 274-277.

resulted from Rebel attempts to oppose Sherman's march to the sea also contributed to the lack of control over Southern operations in Tennessee. As a result, for much of November and December Taylor exercised only a nominal control over his department. Thus, apart from Forrest's cavalry, the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana did not contribute any troops to Hood's offensive.

While Hood, Beauregard and Taylor must all take some of the responsibility for the collapse of the Confederate effort in the west in late 1864, Davis must assume the major portion of the blame. He erred badly when he refused to learn from the problems of the Department of the West faced in 1863, and again issued orders creating the Military Division of the West which were vague and restrictive of Beauregard's authority. Finally, however, it must be recognized that by the fall of 1864 Union forces had become so strong that the Confederates would always find themselves at a severe disadvantage. At this point in the war the careful drawing of departmental boundaries and the delineation of authority was increasingly impossible as one crisis followed another, straining the Rebel command structure to its breaking point and finally forcing it to collapse.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The final collapse of the western Confederacy in the spring of 1865 saw the departmental organization ending much as it had begun, with a widespread dispersal of troops in a cordon defense. Yet despite the final Southern defeat the departmental system had both helped and hindered the Rebel war effort.

The departmental system successfully fulfilled several of the objectives it had been designed to meet. During the first year of the war localistic demands for a military presence were admirably met by the various departmental commands. Davis' policy of dispersing troops throughout the Confederacy satisfied the pressures state governments exerted for their local defense. Just as important was the fact that the departmental system was a familiar structure that built upon an organizational arrangement which both the newly created political and military establishments knew had worked in the past.¹

As the war developed the departmental structure also

¹Clement Eaton, Jefferson Davis (New York, 1977), p. 244; Gow, "The Old Army and the Confederacy, 1861-1865", p. 141; Vandiver, Rebel Brass, pp. 34-35.

insured that disaffected regions, such as East Tennessee and western North Carolina, were satisfactorily brought under governmental control. Additionally, the system provided the Trans-Mississippi with an organizational structure for the continuation of the war effort into 1865.²

Logistically, the departmental system in the West proved to be a mixed success. Departmental decentralization was not a problem as long as demands upon each department's resources did not exceed local resources. Indeed, as exports from the Trans-Mississippi demonstrated, resources from a military hinterland could readily be transferred from one department to another. It was when a department was either too small, or had too many troops present to be able to sustain themselves from local resources, that problems could arise. During the late fall of 1862 the Army of Tennessee suffered from a want of provisions even as the commissary depot at Atlanta stockpiled thousands of bushels of wheat and barrels of flour and over 2 million pounds of bacon.³

But it is in the matter of military success that the final judgement of the value of the departmental structure must be made; how well did the system adjust to changing strategic conditions? Here the picture is the least

²Connelly, Autumn of Glory, p. 183.

³Ibid., p. 17.

positive, although the system did have its successes. In the spring and early summer of 1862 Davis acted to concentrate authority over smaller departments, creating larger and more effective commands. He successfully directed the transition from a cordon defense to a system of concentrated armies. Department No. 2 expanded and grew to successfully oppose Halleck's advance into northern Mississippi and Alabama. Again in the spring of 1864 the co-operation exhibited by Polk in his transfer of the Army of Mississippi to northern Georgia provides a demonstration of a successful inter-departmental operation.

Nevertheless, the departmental system also had its weaknesses and failures. The rigidity of the system, and its tendency to discourage the transfer of forces from one department to another, delayed reinforcements from being sent to the Army of Tennessee for such a length of time as to seriously weaken the value of the Confederate concentration just before the battle of Chickamauga. The earlier campaign in Kentucky also exhibited the potential for problems that personal disagreements over strategy and the lack of co-operation could engender. Bragg's inability to directly control the actions of Kirby Smith forced Bragg to face Buell's army with only a part of his potential strength.

Thus it can be concluded that the primary problem of

the departmental system lay in the difficulty it encountered developing a system of effective command control and co-ordination. In this respect Jefferson Davis may be held culpable for much of the failure of the system. Davis' refusal to deviate from a policy that always left the final decision on inter-departmental co-operation to the local departmental commanders all too often allowed the parochialism inherent in the structure to mitigate the implementation of a viable strategy. The strategy of the offensive-defensive, which depended on Northern incursions being met by a concentrated counteroffensive, was more than once held back by a lengthy bout of inter-departmental wrangling.⁴ When co-operation could finally be achieved it was often only after a crisis had grown into unmanageable proportions.

Co-operation proved impossible to obtain except in reaction to these crises. When Bragg in 1862 and Hood in 1864 took up the offensive no aid was forthcoming from outside of their departments. Significant reinforcements for the Army of Tennessee were available only when Grant's 1862 invasion, Rosecrans' invasion in 1863, and Sherman's invasion in the following year penetrated deep into Southern territory.

Yet the basic departmental system was potentially

⁴Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Strategy", pp. 21-30.

viable. By the end of 1862 the mistakes of the past year had been taken into account, and the creation of the Department of the West was an attempt to profit from these past errors. The Department of the West and, to a lesser degree, the Military Division of the West, were serious efforts to try to find a compromise solution to the problems of exercising command control over the separate departments. Had the system created in November of 1862 been carried further it might even have been the solution to the command problems which so bedeviled the western Confederates. By the creation of this department Davis had demonstrated his willingness to adapt and change his strategic organization. He accepted that he was unable to effectively direct Western strategic planning from Richmond and that a method of limited centralization was necessary.⁵ Yet the Department of the West was not successful; Johnston proved unable to work within the confines of a theatre command. Significantly, a year later Beauregard also failed to manage a similar structure as created in the Military Division of the West. In both cases the commanding generals expressed the belief that they were operating under vague orders which left them

⁵Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Unified Army Command", p. 28; Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Strategy", p. 31.

uncertain of the extent of their authority.⁶ The government in Richmond also added to the problem by contradicting its expressed desire to give the West a theatre command by repeatedly interfering in Western command decisions. The shifting of Stevenson's Division from Tennessee to Mississippi in December 1862 and the conflicting orders issued to Pemberton in May 1863 are two of the more obvious examples.

The question must therefore be raised as to why the concept of a theatre command as envisaged in the Department of the West and the Military Division of the West proved a failure. The answer must lie not only in the problems of conflicting personalities but also in the prevailing military theory of the period. Apart from the Prussians, all other European examples of military structures emphasized that field command was the focus of a commander. The French experience, upon which American thinking most heavily relied, drew strongly from the Napoleonic tradition with its emphasis on personalized command. Johnston and Beauregard were not the only generals to question the viability of a theatre-type command structure. In the early summer of 1862 Robert E. Lee was asked to take command of the Army of Northern Virginia while continuing to act as Chief-of-Staff to

⁶Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis and Unified Army Command", pp. 31-32; Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard, pp. 241-242.

Davis. He flatly declared such a system to be unworkable and forced the President to choose between the two assignments.⁷

Davis' problems with the western multi-departmental commands are therefore more understandable when it is realized that he was in effect making up new rules as he went along. Yet in spite of this Davis must be held to blame for also not effectively utilizing his more traditional powers of command. Had he been more willing to actively provide strategic direction by ordering inter-departmental actions earlier, Confederate hopes in the West would have been immeasurably improved. The concentration at Corinth in 1862, even though it was initiated within Department No. 2, only became effective when Davis ordered reinforcements up from the Department of Alabama and West Florida and Department No. 1. Davis never again, however, acted in so direct a fashion. Despite the failure of inter-departmental co-operation in Kentucky and the collapse of the multi-departmental Department of the West, as late as the fourth year of the war Davis could not find it in himself to provide proper direction to affairs in the West. Although he moved, albeit haltingly, to shift reinforcements to Polk in early

⁷Edward Hagerman, The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), pp. 3, 26, 34; Gow, "The Old Army and the Confederacy, 1861-1865", p. 144.

1864, and then was partly responsible for Polk's subsequent reinforcement of the Army of Tennessee in northern Georgia, Davis was unwilling to impose close coordination on all the Rebel forces in the West during the Atlanta campaign. The organizational failure of the Military Department of the West also evidenced Davis' failure to learn from the earlier problems which had plagued the Department of the West. As it was, for most of the four long years of war the departmental structure in the western Confederacy existed as a body without a head.

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